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THE MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE

A Sequel to "A Leap in the Dark"

By

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"The Trail of the Serpent," "A Skeleton in the Closet," "Nearest and Dearest," "The Lost Lady of Lone," Etc.

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"THE MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE"

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THE
MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE

CHAPTER I

MR. GOODWIN'S STORY

When Ora awoke she found the sun had climbed high in the heavens. She aroused Bevvie, then hastily dressing she left the room to go down stairs.

The first thing she noticed on crossing the threshold was that the door of the haunted chamber was wide open and the place was full of light, looking the least like a ghostly scene of any room that could be imagined.

"But that goes for nothing," said Ora to herself. "It looked just as bright and cheerful on each of the three mornings after the terrible frights! I must hear how Mr. Goodwin passed the night."

She hurried down stairs and out upon the lawn, where she found the old squire walking up and down.

She bade him good morning and apologized for her late rising, saying that she had not been able to go to sleep until long after midnight, and had in consequence overslept herself.

"Precisely my own case, I assure you, my dear. I

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have not been down here more than ten or twelve minutes. What a fine morning it is," said the old gentleman.

"Yes; a most glorious morning! And I am so glad that you have not been waiting long, Mr. Goodwin. I hope, also, that you have had a good night's rest."

"Never better in my life, Ora! I believe your ghost is all humbug! I lay awake until about two or three o'clock in the morning watching for its appearance, and not a shade of a ghost showed! I meant to have lain awake and watched until daylight, but sleep overtook me unawares and—I overslept myself."

"And you were not disturbed at all?"

"Not in the least!"

"I am very glad to hear that! I hope this news will reassure the girls."

"No; it would not, Ora. Not a bit of it. The little idiots have got ghosts in their little noddles, and nothing in the world will get them out, unless we can be so lucky as to discover and prove the goblins to have been the work of impostors or practical jokers. That was what I hoped to do last night; but I see I took the wrong course, for after making sure that there was no one in the room, I locked, bolted, barred and chained every door and window so securely that no joker could have entered. Now, to-night, and every night during my stay here, I shall leave doors and windows unfastened, and then keep on the watch; and if I do catch the practical joker, he will find it no joke to fall into my hands—I can tell him that!"

Ora remembered that on the three occasions of the apparition of the supposed specter, the doors and windows had been most effectually secured; but she chose only to allude to the last occasion, as she had never

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told the secret of her own or of Bevvie's adventure in the haunted chamber; so she merely said:

"On the night on which your two daughters slept here, Mr. Goodwin, I myself fastened every door and window safely, and heard the last door by which I left the room locked and bolted after me; and yet it seems that some one, or something, entered the chamber."

"Tut, tut, my dear! Some one was concealed somewhere in the room," said the incredulous squire.

"Oh! but we all carefully scrutinized every inch of space everywhere."

"Rubbish, child! You must have neglected shaking out the curtains, or looking into dark corners, or committed some other oversight that left some joker in the room."

"I tell you no! It was utterly impossible. Three of us searched every inch of space in the room."

"Then you left some bolt or lock unfastened, and the joker crept in in the night and played his pranks to frighten my girls. I wish I had that lively individual here. I'd make him dance a lively jig to the accompaniment of my good rattan cane and his own sweet voice."

"Mr. Goodwin, I tell you, on my honor, that no creature besides ourselves was in the room, or could have got in the room, on the night when your daughters were so terribly frightened. More—I do not believe in supernatural apparitions, nor can I pretend to account for the phenomena on that night in that room. But this I do affirm in the most solemn manner, that after I had left the room, and heard the door locked and bolted behind me, no other creature of flesh and blood was in that room except the girls, or could possibly have got in without their knowledge and consent."

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"Well, well, my dear, I dare say you think so. Nay, indeed, I know you must believe what you say, or you would not say it. But, as for me, I am not convinced," laughed the old gentleman.

The appearance of Old Uncle Charley at the front door with the announcement that breakfast was ready put an end to the dispute, and called the disputants into the house.

They found Bevvie waiting for them in the oak parlor, where the table had been set.

"Well, Miss Bevvie," began the squire, as soon as he caught sight of her, "I have to inform you that your ghost is a humbug, and a coward, a poltroon, and a sneak. He comes to frighten little girls in the dark, but he is afraid to face an old man. Now what do you think of your ghost?"

"You were not disturbed, then, last night, Mr. Goodwin?" asked Bevvie, without answering his question.

"Not to any great extent. I slept 'like an angel,' as the children's nurses say, until nearly eight o'clock this morning."

"Then you were fortunate," replied Bevvie.

"Marse Tomfilius, rice cakes do not improve by growing cold. Take your seat, please," suggested Ora, as she placed herself at the head of the table.

Bevvie and the squire sat down, the one on the right side and the other on the left, and the little party left off discussing the mysterious phenomena of the haunted chamber to investigate the very substantial luxuries placed before them.

After breakfast Mr. Goodwin took a temporary leave of his young hostess, and set out in the pony chaise to attend to his own business at Welcoming and to fetch his eldest daughter, Hyacinth, to Hall-in-Umbra.

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And Ora spent the forenoon in fitting up a chamber in the rear of Bevvie's room for the new guest. To do this she had to lay every other apartment in the house under contribution; but the result was perfectly satisfactory in a pleasant-looking and most comfortable bed chamber. Mr. Goodwin and Hyacinth arrived in the afternoon in time for an early tea.

Both Ora and Bevvie received their girl friend with unmistakable joy and thankfulness. They were so tired of their isolation, and had been so disappointed and wounded by the desertion of Myrtle and Laurel.

"And here is your mail, my dear, that I brought from Lower Umbra. A handful of papers and magazines, and one letter, with the Richmond post mark; from your attorney, no doubt," said Mr. Goodwin, as he delivered his pockets of their voluminous contents.

"Oh! thank you, Mr. Goodwin. Thank you so much. Just let them lie there on the table until I take dear Hyacinth to her room," said Ora warmly, as she left the oak parlor to lead her guest upstairs.

Meanwhile Bevvie filled the old squire's pipe, and lighted it for him; for he always said that a smoke never did him so much good as when one of his own daughters, or, failing them, some dear young friend, lighted his pipe for him.

He took it from Bevvie, gave her a smile in return, and walked out on the lawn to smoke in the open air.

Meanwhile, Hyacinth, having taken off her hat and jacket, came down with Ora to join Bevvie in the oak parlor, where, on the center table, lay Miss Orkney's unopened mail.

"There is your letter, Ora, dear. It may be important. Don't stand on ceremony with me, I beg. I will open

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some of these magazines and examine the fashion plates," said Hyacinth, seating herself at the table.

"Oh, it is only Dent's letter, with something for me to sign and send back, I dare say. He is always sending me something to sign and return. I may have signed away my soul by this time, for aught I know to the contrary," said Ora, with a careless laugh, as she took up the letter that was destined to change the whole aspect of her life. And yet her own color did not fade as she read it.

CHAPTER II

STARTLING NEWS

It was the letter of the old family friend as well as of the solicitor, and it ran as follows:

"Richmond, Sept. 25, 18—.

"My Dear Miss Orkney: I have unpleasant news for you, which I should have brought down in person had it been possible for me to get away from my engagements here.

"In a word, my dear young lady, another will of the late Pendleton Orkney has been discovered. It is of a much later date than the one by which you inherit. It leaves legacies of twenty-five thousand dollars to each of his three sisters and to yourself, and it bequeaths the residue of his vast estate to his nephew, Mr. Conrad Orkney, and appoints him sole executor.

"The existence of this will was made known to me some weeks since by Messrs. Jephson & Striker, but I doubted its authenticity, and would not trouble you

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with the subject until I had investigated the matter for myself.

"I now regret to inform you that I am convinced of the genuineness of the instrument in question.

"The only course open to us is to contest the will on the ground of the unsoundness of mind in the testator.

"I think that this can be done successfully, for these reasons, namely:

"The first will made in your favor was executed when the testator was in perfect health of body and mind, and in the full enjoyment of all his faculties. But the second will, leaving you only a legacy equal to those left to his sisters, and constituting his nephew residuary legatee and sole executor, was made when he was on his death bed, where he was subject to long seasons of delirium and only short intervals of reason—if his recognition of surrounding persons and things could be called reason.

"So you see, my dear Miss Orkney, that we have good grounds to proceed upon.

"I now await your instructions. If you could come up to the city, your presence here would greatly facilitate matters. Let me hear from you immediately. In the meantime, and always, I am very truly yours,

"NICHOLAS DENT."

Ora folded the letter and put it into her pocket. Neither of her companions could have guessed from her appearance that she had just received the news of her disinheritance by her uncle's last will, and had been asked to contest the instrument in the courts of law.

Her face was beaming with satisfaction.

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"You have received good news," said Bevvie, who had been watching her.

"Yes, very," answered Ora.

"Stocks in which you had invested gone up a hundred per cent., perhaps," suggested Hyacinth, with a smile.

"No," replied Ora. "But, dear girls, this is a letter that requires an immediate answer. So if you will excuse me, I will leave you for a few minutes."

"Certainly! Certainly! Why, Ora, if you should treat me with ceremony, I would go home at once!" Hyacinth declared.

Ora was accustomed to do all her writing at a secretary in this same oak parlor; but as her two friends chose to sit in this room, and she could not ask them to leave, she gathered up some writing materials and went and shut herself up in the long drawing-room to reply to her attorney's letter, which, by the way, really had filled her soul with satisfaction. And for a reason that shall now be explained.

It may be recollected that there had, within the last year, an estrangement grown between Ora and her lover cousin, Conrad Orkney. The latter, by nature frank, ardent, faithful, and honorable, was also proud, suspicious, and uncharitable. He disliked what he called Ora's morbid devotion to Bevvie, and he highly disapproved of her eccentric journey with no other companion than this girl of unknown parentage, whom, though but five years younger than herself, she absurdly called her adopted daughter.

He had frankly expressed his disapprobation at the time; but Ora had seemed to disregard it, and to act in direct opposition to it.

Since then all correspondence had ceased between the lover cousins.

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Even on the occasion of Ora's visit to Richmond, to consult her attorney on business connected with that first will by which she had inherited, Ora had not seen fit to make her presence in the city known to Conrad Orkney. It was not her place, she thought, to seek an interview with him. She could do nothing toward effecting a reconciliation.

And she had waited from that time for him to hold out the olive branch.

At length she thought she saw why he did not do so. She thought it was because that since their estrangement she had inherited her uncle's vast estate, which had constituted her, perhaps, the richest heiress in America, and that he now refrained from seeking a reconciliation with her, not from cherished resentment, but from the supposition that his motives might be miscontrued into mercenary ones.

Ora understood and lamented this morbid pride, not knowing how to meet it without some sacrifice of delicacy.

But now the discovery of this second will had thrown down the barrier between them, and had given him the vast inheritance in question, and had left her with only her modest patrimony, consisting of the Hall-in-Umbra plantation, now somewhat impoverished through the effects of the late civil war, and with the moderate legacy bequeathed by her uncle.

"The result of this will be a reunion with Conrad, and then I shall not lose the estate (even if I cared for it!), but shall recover both it and my beloved!" said Ora, as she smilingly seated herself at the drawing-room table, and wrote as follows, from her impulsive young heart:

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"HALL-IN-UMBRA, Sept. 30, 18—

"MY DEAR MR. DENT: Your letter of the 25th instant is at hand. You need not have delayed a single moment to announce the discovery of my uncle's second and more righteous will, leaving the bulk of his great estate to my cousin.

"It is not bad news, but the very best news that could possibly reach me!

"I would not have you contest that will for the world! I am the person most interested, and I declare to you that nothing on earth could tempt me to dispute that wise and just will.

"As to the question of my uncle's relative soundness of mind when he made the first will and when he made the second, I should certainly decide in favor of his perfect sanity during the second transaction, when, being on his death bed, he put away from him the anger of years (which had induced him while in health and strength to make a will cutting off all his other relations in favor of one young niece), and made another and a wiser and juster will, leaving his sisters and his niece really handsome legacies, but bequeathing the residue of his vast property to his only nephew and natural heir, Conrad Orkney. So I beg that you will notify Messrs. Jephson & Striker that the second will is not to be contested. And please also take all necessary steps to make, on our part, immediate restitution to the rightful heirs. Very truly your friend,

"ORESTA ORKNEY."

Having written her letter, Ora sealed it up and directed it, muttering to herself:

"This must start on its errand of destiny before Mr. Goodwin hears anything about the second will. I can't

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have 'Marse Tomfilius,' in his blind fondness for my father's child, worrying me with arguments in favor of going to law."

She went out through the back way to the stables, where she found old Uncle Charley busy among the horses.

"Uncle Charley!"

"Hi! Lor-a-messy, young mist'ess, how yer scared me! Dese times, too, when fings is alless 'pearin' to people!" exclaimed the old man, as he jumped, and then stood at "attention."

"Charley, you have been out many a night coon hunting, haven't you?"

"Hik! hik! hik! young mist'ess; who yer axin'? Many an' many a night is I bin out f'om dark to daylight huntin' coons! An' no longer ago'n las' winter, neider! Want a coon, young mist'ess? Mos' too airly in de season, dough, ain't it?"

"I don't want a coon, Uncle Charley; but I want you to go out for me now. I have a letter that must be posted at Lower Umbra this evening before eight o'clock, or it will be too late for the mail. It is now half-past five. You will still have daylight enough to guide you through the woods of Umbra in going, and the moon will be up in time to light you home again. Will you be afraid?"

"F'aid?—yes, young mist'ess, I be 'f'aid enough! I mos' 'f'aid to go f'om har to de kitchen arter sunset, in dese days, w'en fings 'pears to ebberybody! But I go all de same, young mist'ess. Gimmy dat yere letter, an' I tote it to de pos' office in time, spite ob all de ghoseses on de yerth."

"Thank you, Uncle Charley, I am so much obliged to you! Nothing will hurt or frighten you, I am sure!"

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"Hopes not, young mist'ess! Alless says my prayers w'en I go t'rough dem dark woods at night, dough!"

"That is right! Now, good afternoon, you good Uncle Charley! When you get back from the post office, come up to the house, and I will see you again before I retire," said Ora, as she turned away.

"Good arternoon, young mist'ess," replied the old man, bowing low, and watching the young lady until he saw her enter the house.

"Dar! She's safe! Now I go and saddle Wings, and set off to de pos' office, ef de debbil an' his imps will let me get dar!" said the old man, turning into the stable.

Meanwhile Ora re-entered the oak parlor, into which Mr. Goodwin, having smoked out his pipe, followed her.

She drew the lawyer's letter from her pocket and handed it to the squire, saying:

"Please look over this, and then read it aloud for the benefit of the company."

Mr. Goodwin took it smilingly, but—

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had read the first paragraph.

"Read it aloud without comment, please, and it will tell the story," said Ora.

The squire turned to the commencement and read it out to the girls, who listened with eager interest, for everything that concerned Ora affected them.

"Gracious goodness, Ora!" exclaimed Hyacinth.

"Why—it—it has disinherited you," whispered Bevvie.

"Fiddle-de-dee, my dears. Nothing of the sort. We shall contest the will and overthrow it!" said the old squire.

"Begging your pardon, dear Mr. Goodwin, we shall

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not contest the will. It is a wise and just will, and I am perfectly satisfied with it. It shall stand!" said Ora firmly.

The old squire stared at her.

"Listen to me, Mr. Goodwin," she said; and, while he bent a polite and attentive face toward her, she went over all the arguments she had used in her letter to the lawyer, and finished by saying to her old neighbor something else which she had not written to her solicitor.

"I know, Mr. Goodwin, that it is in my interest that you speak, when you refer to contesting the will; but, dear friend, that will be better served by my not doing so. I cannot go to law with my betrothed, you see."

"Your betrothed? Oh, ay; certainly, yes! to be sure. You and Conrad were to be married when his practice should afford him an income to justify him in taking a wife. I remember his telling me so. Insolent young dog! Too proud to live on the revenues of Hall-in-Umbra, because the place is yours, and too poor to marry until he should get a living law practice! And he might live to be an old bachelor, and you an old maid, before that should come to pass. Now he will have this money himself, and he will not be ashamed to ask for your hand. And so you will get all the money back without going to law for it. Oh, you girls!" laughed the old gentleman.

"Please, ma'am, tea is on the table," said Betsy the housemaid, putting her head in at the door.

Because Ora's visitors had settled themselves in the oak parlor instead of in the long drawing-room, tea was laid in the dining room in the rear, and thither Ora now led her guests and placed them around the table.

During tea, and afterward, when the four friends

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were walking up and down the covered front piazza, Ora on the arm of Mr. Goodwin, and Bevvie on that of Hyacinth, the changed fortunes of Miss Orkney was the only subject discussed by the company, to the utter exclusion of that of the supernatural phenomena.

The lawn and the woodland scene by moonlight was so very alluring that the promenaders remained out longer than usual.

CHAPTER III

OLD CHARLEY'S FRIGHT

They were still walking on the piazza when, at about ten o'clock, horses' hoofs were heard coming along the irregular drive through the wooded lawn, and Old Charley rode up to the horse-block in front of the house, dismounted, tied his horse, walked up to the piazza, and took off his hat.

"Well, Uncle Charley, you have got back safe and sound. Did you mail my letter in time?" pleasantly inquired Ora.

"Yes, young mist'ess, an' in fuss yate time, too, wid half an hour to spare."

"Very well. And you have got back all right. No bogies bothered you in the woods?"

"Donno 'bout bogies, honey! I t'ought it was de debbil hisse'f!" replied the old man.

"What? Did anything frighten you, Uncle Charley?"

"Yere, my young mist'ess! If I's got to tell you 'bout it, jest lemme sit right down yere on dis bottom

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step ob de piazzy, 'cause I gets weak when I finks about it. Lemme sit down on dis yere bottom step."

"Not at all, Uncle Charley! Come up here and sit in your old master's own arm chair and rest your back. You'll excuse the old man, Mr. Goodwin, and you, Hyacinth?" inquired Ora, turning to her guests.

"Oh, why, of course we will! Why do you ask us?" said the old squire, speaking for himself and daughter.

"Thank you. Now, then, Uncle Charley, tell us what frightened you?" inquired Ora, as soon as the old negro had settled in his seat.

"It war de debbil, honey! Leastways, I fink it war de debbil! Oh, Lor'!"

"Tell us about it, Uncle Charley."

"Yes, honey; I's gwine to. 'Deed I is! Oh, Lor'!"

"When was it, Uncle Charley? Was it when you were going, or when you were returning?" inquired Miss Orkney, with a view to help him out, while both her girl companions bent eagerly forward to listen, and Mr. Goodwin stood with Ora still hanging on his arm, and he looking amused and incredulous.

"It war when I was 'turning home, honey! Oh, Lor'!"

"Was it near Lower Umbra, or near the hall?"

"It war—oh, Lor'—it war 'bout 'arf way 'twixt 'em bofe, in de wery deepes', darkes' part ob de dark woods, jes' whar dat little creek crosses ober de road—dat little creek wot comes down from de mountains 'bove de caves—oh, Lor'!"

"I know the place. What happened then?"

"Oh, Lor'!—oh, Lor'—oh, Lor'!"

"Ora, my dear, 'give strong drink to him that is ready to die.' If you don't, you will get no ghost story out of this old man to-night!" said the squire.

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Ora ran into the oak parlor, opened the medicine chest in the corner cupboard, and soon returned with a small glass of cognac brandy, which she handed to the old negro.

He took it with a trembling hand, bowed to the company generally, said something about "their honors' health," and tossed off the brandy.

"Yes, young mist'ess, dat war good physic, dat war! which it has done me heap o' good, too! T'anky, young mist'ess," said Old Charley; and he would have hobbled up to put the glass away, but Ora took it from him and set it on the window sill, for the present.

"Now, then, Uncle Charley, what happened at Cave Creek?"

"Oh, young mist'ess! Jes' as I war 'bout to loose de bridle to let Wings drink, somefin' swushed up from de groun' an' went right up into de top ob de tree! I sez to myse'f, 'Dat's a coon,' an' me an' my young mist'ess talkin' 'bout goin' coon huntin' no longer 'go dan dis ebenin'! Well, I hadn't got no weapon wid me, but who kin help frowin' stones at a coon in a tree? So I gets down offen de hoss, an' gadders up a han'ful o' stones from the crik an' lets fly at de coon in de tree! An'—oh, Lor'! Wot's dat ahind me, mist'ess?" exclaimed the old man, with a frightened glance over his left shoulder.

"Nothing is behind you but the wall of the house, Uncle Charley," said Ora.

"'Deed, I t'ought somefin war behind me a-lookin' over my shoulder! Oh, Lor'!"

"Go on with your story. What happened after you threw the stones up into the tree?"

"Oh, Lor', young mist'ess! It wan't no coon. It jumped right out'n de tree onto de back ob de hoss, an' 'gan to grin an' chatter an' roll its great goggle eyes,

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till de hoss 'gan to get scared an' rear up, an' den de—fing—jumped off de saddle into de middle ob de road, ahind de hoss, an' I, mos' dead wid fear, drap' down on my knees an' prayed to de Lord to libber me f'om Satan, an' I'd try to be a better man! An' all dat time dat hoss, in a fit, kickin' up an' snortin'! Dunno how long dat lasted, mist'ess, but I said my prayers as hard as I could, an' den w'en I t'ought de—fing—war gone for good, I went an' coaxed an' petted de hoss, an' climbed up in my seat, an' kept on praying to de Lor' ef He would only spare my libe dis time an' let me go home safe, I would nebber no more frow no stones at no coons nor no oder ob His innercin dumb creeturs, worl' widout end amen! An' so I started on my road home agin."

"What was this creature like, Uncle Charley?"

"Like! Oh, Lor', young mist'ess, 'ow kin I tell yer? It war sumfin' like—like a buzzard, an' somefin' like—like a owl!—an' like a porkorpine, only it war a heap bigger dan any ob 'um!—an' like—like—like a ole man, only it war a heap smaller!—dat's wot it war like, nigh as I can tell yer!" concluded the old man.

All his hearers laughed at this description.

"Oh, yes, yer may laugh, young mist'esses! Yer may laugh, but ef yer'd seed wot I did, yer wouldn't a-laughed!" said the old man in an offended tone.

"But, gracious goodness, Uncle Charley!" said Ora, "the creatures you have compared it to are not at all alike. A buzzard, an owl, a porcupine, and an old man are all different."

"'Diffunt?' 'Diffunt?' Well, an' so was it diffunt. Diffunt f'om eberyfing yer ebber seed in yer life!"

"Well, Uncle Charley, I will give you another thimbleful of cognac and then you shall go and put up your

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horse and come back to fasten up the house and go to bed," said Ora.

"T'anky, young mist'ess, yer's mighty good to de ole man! 'Deed yer is! I want to tell yer one fing, dough: Doan yer ebber ax me to go froo dem dere lonesome woods ag'in in de dark hours ob de night; 'cause I'd radder die dan to 'fuse yer anyfin', an' likewise radder die dan go froo dem woods. Yer hear me good, honey?"

"Yes, Uncle Charley; and I will never send you on such a fearful errand again," said Ora soothingly.

"T'anky, young mist'ess! 'Sides which I has p'omised an' wowed two fings in my name, 'cordin' to catechism. Fust, nebber to go froo no lonesome woods in de dead hour ob de night; an' second, nebber to heave stones at none ob de Lord's po' innercin dumb creeturs, long as ebber I lib, worl' widout end amen!"

"Quite right, Uncle Charley. Come in now. It is nearly eleven o'clock," said Ora, rising and taking the little glass she had left upon the window sill.

All then went into the house, and Ora opened the medicine chest, gave the old negro his second small modicum of cognac, and when he had tossed it off, she dispatched him with orders to take the horse to the stable and then return to close up the house for the night.

The whole party soon retired to rest. Ora accompanied Hyacinth to the room prepared for her in the rear of Bevvie's chamber, and said:

"Now, my dear Cynthia, if, under the existing circumstances, you object to sleeping alone, I will be your bedfellow. What do you say?"

"Well—if you wouldn't mind it, I should like to have

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you stay with me, Ora. I do confess to the unprecedented experience of feeling a little nervous to-night."

"Just so; I will stay with you," said Miss Orkney cheerfully.

"What do you suppose it really was that frightened the old man in the woods?"

"I cannot even conjecture. It might have been some wild animal—a raccoon or a fox, transformed by his heated imagination into a monster."

"Ora, do you know that the old man's description of the—thing—wild and inconsistent as that description was—tallied in some respects with Myrtle and Laurel's account of the apparition that frightened them?"

"In what respect, Cynthia?"

"In this: he compared it to a buzzard; Myrtle spoke of a great bushy head. He compared it also to an owl; Myrtle spoke of its great staring eyes. He finally compared it to a porcupine; Myrtle told of the starting hair that twined and stood out like serpents' heads. Don't you see?"

"Yes," said Ora faintly, for she thought that both descriptions tallied somewhat with her own recollections of the phantom that had disturbed her rest.

"Do you suppose, Ora, that the apparition seen by Myrtle and Laurel in the long room and that which frightened Old Charley in the woods to be the same?"

"I do not know, Cynthia."

"But what do you think?"

"I cannot think. Dear girl, let us not talk any more about this inexplicable mystery; for if we do, we shall not sleep a wink to-night."

"And doubtless you are sick of the subject, Ora. So we will go to bed."

"Excuse me, for five minutes, dear," said Ora, as she

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left the room, and went into Bevvie's chamber to fetch her personal effects.

Between ghosts and guests, the young lady of Hall-in-Umbra was very much tossed about from chamber to chamber in her own house.

She gathered up her belongings, kissed Bevvie and the baby good night, and returned to her new room-mate.

Hyacinth was standing before the glass taking off her ornaments.

Among them was an elegant watch and chain that immediately attracted Ora's attention.

"What a beautiful watch! And what a beautiful design!—a hyacinth in turquois and malachite," she said.

"Yes, Ora; is it not beautiful? Papa had it done to order in New York and gave it to me for a birthday present last week. He says that now, as the birthdays of his daughters come, he means to give them watches, each with her name flower set on hers in precious stones. Jessamine, whose birthday comes next month, is to have a white jessamine on hers in white onyx and malachite. Pink, Myrtle, and Laurel are to have flowers and leaves corresponding to their names set in malachite, and spangled with diamond dew. Is it not a pretty design? They are supposed not to know anything about this, but I scarcely think their presents will be a surprise to them, for, after having seen mine, they will naturally anticipate a similar gift."

"Naturally," acquiesced Ora.

"Now I forgot to bring my case, and shall have to lay my precious watch here on my pocket handkerchief on the top of the bureau," said Hyacinth, settling her beautiful timepiece on its bed for the night, as if it had been some living pet.

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Then the two girls made a careful search of the room, to be sure that no contraband creature was hidden in it, secured the doors and windows with bolts and bars, so strong as to keep all mischievous intruders out, and finally retired to rest.

CHAPTER IV

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

Make a firm-built fence of trust
All around to-day;
Fill the space with living work,
And within it stay.
Look not through the sheltering bars,
Anxious for to-morrow,
God will help in all that comes,
Be it joy or sorrow.—ANON.

HYACINTH, an early flower, was the first to get up, in the morning.

Ora, waking later, missed her bedfellow from her side.

Sitting up, she saw the window shutters open, letting in the light; but her room-mate was nowhere to be seen.

"Cynthia!' she called.

"Here I am!" answered the girl, rising from her hands and knees on the floor.

"Why, what are you doing down there?"

"Looking for my watch, but I can't find it anywhere."

"You can't find your watch!" exclaimed Ora, stepping out of bed to assist in the search.

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"No; indeed, I cannot. I went to look for it, to see what time it was, as soon as I had opened the windows, and I could not find it. Then I thought it might have slipped off the top of the bureau somehow, and fallen on the carpet—though I do not see how it could have done so, either! And, besides, I cannot find it there."

"Are you sure you did not put it in one of the bureau drawers?' inquired Ora.

"Why, of course I am, and so are you! You saw me lay it carefully in my folded handkerchief, on the top of the bureau."

"Yes; but afterward?"

"Afterward I went straight to bed, without even looking at it again."

"Cynthia," said Ora, after they had searched all over the carpet, behind the bureau, and even under it, "you know we fastened up the room very carefully, last night! Did you find it fast when you got up this morning?"

"Why, yes! There is the door, still locked and bolted! As for the windows, I found them so fast that it took all my strength to draw the bolts!"

"Then I am satisfied as to my servants! They are honest, I do believe; but I am glad to know that it is now impossible to suspect them!"

"Why, what are you talking about, Ora? I do not suspect the servants, and, of course, my watch is in this very room somewhere, because it could not get out, you know!" said Hyacinth, who was now pulling open one drawer after another, in the forlorn hope of finding her precious birthday present in some part of the bureau, at last.

But it was not there.

"Now we must go on what I call the square inch principle, and examine every inch between these four

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walls, until we find that watch," said Ora; "that is, if it be here," she added.

"Oh, it must be here, you know! For it could not possibly have got away!" confidently asserted Hyacinth.

And now a more vigorous and minute search was commenced.

Everything in the bureau drawers, in the boxes, and closets, was taken out and shaken. Every pitcher, ewer and vase was emptied and turned upside down. All the bed clothes were shaken out, and the bed was made; the rugs were turned over!

All in vain!

At length both girls were obliged to confess that the watch was not in that room.

Meanwhile they had heard all the other inmates of the house going downstairs, and yet, in their anxious search for the watch, they had neglected to dress themselves.

"We must not keep your father waiting for his breakfast, dearest! We will resume our search afterward," said Ora.

"Yes," said Hyacinth, half crying; "but do not let us say anything to father of my loss! Let him eat his breakfast in peace."

"Of course," assented Ora.

And each girl began to make a hasty toilet.

In the middle of their task there was a rap at their door.

Ora went and drew the bolt, let down the chain, and opened to Aunt Nelie.

"Breakfas' is been waitin' dis half an hour or mo'! I t'ought maybe as somefin had happened!" said the woman, as she stood in the doorway.

"Come in, Nelie. Something has happened! Miss

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Goodwin has lost, or at least she has missed, her handsome gold watch," whispered Ora.

"Now de Lor-a-massy 'pon my po' soul!" exclaimed Nelie, dropping down on a footstool as if unable to stand up under the new blow. "Dere, now! Wot I tell yer, honey? It's dem dere low-life city niggers wot make 'way wid all dis yere walluables! See dere, now! Ef yer had took my 'vice, honey, an' had dem city trash 'rested for stealin' dat walluable green-and-goole box full o' jewelry, dis yere wouldn't a happened of!"

"Hush! You are uncharitable! Rachel and Betsy are as honest as I am! Now don't speak of this loss downstairs, but go and have breakfast put on the table. We shall be ready in a few moments," replied Miss Orkney.

And the colored woman rose slowly to her feet, and left the apartment.

"We will lock up the room and take the key with us," said Ora, suiting the action to the word as she and her companion stood in the door before descending to the oak parlor, where they found the breakfast on the table and Mr. Goodwin and Bevvie waiting for them.

"Good morning! Good morning! Began to fear the bogies had carried you off!" said the old squire, coming to meet the two girls.

"Oh, no! There are no bogies in that back room! And I only hope you slept as well as we did, Mr. Goodwin," said Ora.

"Oh, I slept perfectly! I have never been disturbed, you know! I am still an unbeliever in your bogies!"

"You believe more in realities! Come, now, let us make reality very real indeed by eating our breakfast."

And as the young lady said this she advanced toward

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the table, and signed to her guests to follow her example.

"I shall have to leave you soon, my dears, and ride over to Welcoming to see how they are getting on there. But I will return this evening to my post of duty," said the squire, as he received his cup of coffee from the hands of his young hostess.

And then Ora and Hyacinth exchanged glances to the effect that they need not mention the loss of the watch to-day, at any rate, and perhaps before night it might be found.

Almost immediately after breakfast the squire mounted his horse and rode off to Welcoming.

And then the search for the missing watch was recommenced by Ora and Hyacinth alone.

In the middle of the mêlée Bevvie, who had not heard of the loss, came in to ask what was the matter. She was followed by Betsy, who came on her own legitimate business of housemaid, to clear up the bedroom.

"Why don't you come downstairs? What are you staying up here for? Oh, what a litter!" exclaimed Bevvie, as she entered the room and glanced around on the disorder created by Ora and Hyacinth in their search for the lost treasure.

"Why, the fact is, my dear, that Cynthia's beautiful watch and chain seem to have gone to look for your malachite box," said Ora.

"What!" exclaimed Bevvie.

"Yes. She left it on the bureau here last night when she went to bed, and now it cannot be found."

"When did she see it last?"

"At bed time, I tell you."

"And when did she miss it first?"

"When she first got up this morning. And, mind,

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she was the first one up, too, and she found all the doors and windows fast, as she had left them; yet the watch was gone!"

"Oh, doors and windows bolted and barred are no defense against intruders in this house, as we ought to know very well by this time, Ora. Have you searched thoroughly, however?"

"Don't talk! We have spent the morning in searching. If there had been a missing mustard seed in this room, we must have found it."

"Then—are you sure that neither of you walk in your sleep?"

"Pretty sure, I think. And even if one of us were addicted to somnambulism, we were neither of us in your room the night your casket vanished."

"See here, young mist'esses," put in Betsy, who had remained standing, a silent listener to this discourse, "tain' no use you dem 'sputin'. I knows wot come ob dat watch."

"You!" exclaimed Bevvie.

"Yes, me, mist'ess."

"What, what, what became of it?" eagerly demanded Hyacinth.

"Doan like to tell, dough, 'less my young mist'ess dere gimme leabe."

"Of course I give you leave! Speak at once, if you can give any information—though I am pretty sure you cannot," said Ora.

"Well, den, young mist'ess, it's nubbuddy but dese yere low-libe country niggers wot stole dat watch. Ef yer'd a listened to me, and had 'em all took up by de cons'able w'en dey stole dat green-an'-goole caskit, dey wouldn't a had no chance to steal dis yere watch. 'Deed dey wouldn't, young mist'ess!'

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"Betsy! These respectable servants, whom you charge with theft, are entirely above suspicion. They were brought up from infancy in my grandparents' family. Let me hear no more of such accusations!" said Ora.

"Berry well, young mist'ess. 'Tain't none ob my business," said the woman, with a sniff.

"You may go. We will ring if we should need you."

The housemaid left the room, and the search for the missing watch was renewed with fresh zeal, but with no more success.

The dinner bell rang while they were still engaged in the fruitless task.

They went downstairs and gathered around the table, but no one could do justice to the excellent cooking of Aunt Nelie.

Hyacinth was secretly bemoaning the loss of her beautiful watch, her father's birthday gift, with her name flower enameled in turquois and malachite on its case.

Bevvie was reminded of her own serious misfortune in the recent theft of the casket containing her jewels and her documents.

Ora, in her character of hostess, was feeling particularly grieved and humiliated that such robberies should be committed in her house.

After dinner the search was renewed, and extended all over the dwelling.

All the servants were called together and informed of the loss, and offered a handsome reward for the recovery of the watch.

But the only effect of this transaction was a violent recrimination in the kitchen between the "city darkies" and the "country niggers," each faction accusing the

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other of the mysterious thefts that had been committed on the premises.

Worn out at last with their vain work, the three young ladies gave it up for the day, and began to attend to their neglected toilets, so as to be ready to meet Mr. Goodwin when he should return in the evening.

"And do not let us say anything to papa about the loss of the beautiful watch. It will be too late for him to take any steps for its recovery to-night, and the thought of it might keep him awake," said Hyacinth.

"No; you are right. We will not meet him with bad news when he comes in, tired," replied Ora.

CHAPTER V

A MYSTERIOUS RESTITUTION

The three girls descended to the piazza to sit and wait for the return of the squire.

They could think of nothing else, talk of nothing else, but the lost or stolen watch. They were still discussing the unprofitable subject at sunset, when they heard the amble of a horse approaching the house. Soon the squire rode up, dismounted, and walked into the piazza, while Old Charley led away his horse.

"Well," he exclaimed, as bright and cheery as ever, throwing his hat into a corner, and dropping himself into the ever-ready arm chair. "Well! how has passed the day with you? Dear me! Now I look at you, you all look worried. What has happened?"

And the old man glanced from one to the other, and waited for a reply.

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But no answer was forthcoming from the conscience-stricken girls, whose very faces betrayed them.

"Any more mysterious apparitions?" demanded the squire.

"No, Mr. Goodwin, none," replied Ora, very glad that she could reply truthfully to that question.

"Well, then, what is it? I declare to you that I see that something has happened," persisted the old gentleman, and again he waited for a reply.

But none was ready.

"Any more mysterious disappearances, eh?" he next inquired.

Still he received no answer, until suddenly Hyacinth jumped up, and threw herself in her father's arms and burst into tears, exclaiming:

"Oh, papa, yes! I cannot hide it from you any longer, though I intended to do so for to-night, so that you might sleep well. The beautiful watch you gave me, with my name flower on it, is gone, and cannot be found anywhere!" she sobbed.

"Compose yourself, Hyacinth, and tell me all about it," said her father.

The half-hysterical girl, with some difficulty, regained self-control enough to enable her to tell the story—how she and Ora slept together in the back room behind Bevvie's; how they had searched the room and carefully secured it before going to bed; how she had taken off her watch and laid it on her folded handkerchief at the back of the top of the bureau, and then gone to bed.

She went on to tell him that she was the first one up in the room in the morning; that, on looking for her watch to see what time it was, she missed it from its place.

And then she described the long and exhausting

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search that had engaged the whole force of the establishment for the whole day without result.

"It is gone, papa! It is hopelessly lost, like Bevvie's casket. Oh!" cried Hyacinth, bursting into renewed sobs and tears, and hiding her flushed face in her father's breast.

"Oh, come now! Tut, tut, tut! This will never do! Crying for a lost trinket! I am quite ashamed of you, my girl," said the squire, caressing her brown head with his large hand all the time, however.

"Oh, papa! I wouldn't have minded if it hadn't been your gift; your lovely, thoughtful birthday gift to me, with your own design of my name flower enameled on it! Oh, I loved it so, papa! I really loved it, for all that it expressed," cried Hyacinth, struggling to overcome her grief.

"Well, well! Never mind. The same hands that made it can make another like it, even if it were lost, which I don't believe at all!" cheerily exclaimed the squire.

"Oh, papa! We have searched everywhere——"

"Except in my pocket. There! what do you think of this?" cried the squire, putting his hand into the depth of the receptacle alluded to, drawing it forth again and holding up to view—

Hyacinth's enameled watch! A cry of astonishment broke from the three girls present.

"Oh, papa! So you were the magpie! Oh, you 'artful dodger' of a papa! How could you have the heart to tease us so? And above all, how, oh! how did you manage to get into our room and—get hold of that watch?" demanded Hyacinth, overjoyed as she was to recover the lost treasure.

"Yes; Marse Tomfilius, that requires some explana-

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tion," gravely remarked Ora, although she was as delighted as any one at the restoration of the watch.

Bevvie said nothing. She was silently wishing that her missing casket might turn up in the same way.

"My children, I never entered your room, or took this watch from any part of the house. You could never guess where I found it; and when I tell you, you will be as much mystified as I have been for the whole day," said the squire, as he passed over the jewel to its rightful owner.

"Where, then, did you find it, Mr. Goodwin? Please tell us at once," pleaded Bevvie.

"Yes; do, papa," added Hyacinth.

"Well, then, this morning, as I was riding through the woods of Umbra, and had just reached Cave Creek, and stopped to let my horse drink, and while I was thinking of Old Charley's adventure on the same spot, I heard a sudden noise, as if some wild animal had rushed through the brushwood that bordered the creek. I turned quickly in that direction and saw—no living creature, but—the end of a glittering gold chain hanging on a bush. I went for it, and found—your watch, Hyacinth, caught by the chain in the twigs of the tree."

"How could it have got there?" simultaneously exclaimed the three girls.

"My first thought was that you had lost it yesterday on your way here; but then I recollected that I had seen it on your neck when I bade you good night. Then, my final thought was that some dishonest servant had stolen it last night, or early this morning, and in running away with it had dropped it there."

"No human hands could have taken it from our room, papa, because no one could have got in or out of the room. We found it fastened up securely in the morning

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as we had left it in the night. But what is the use of repeating all this? It is a mystery, and will remain a mystery, like the disappearance of Bevvie's malachite casket and the apparition of Myrtle and Laurel's nocturnal visitor," said Hyacinth.

"Come," exclaimed Ora, rising. "I scent the grateful fragrance of steaming hyson. Tea is on the table. Let us go in."

Later in the evening, as a measure of justice to the household servants, they were all called together in the dining room and informed by Ora of the finding of the lost watch by Mr. Goodwin, at Cave Creek, in the woods of Umbra.

"Debbil took it and put it dere, jess to get all we dem in trouble! 'Deed it's de trufe!" said Old Charley, in explanation of the mystery.

But the two opposing factions—the "city darkies" and the "country niggers"—did not exonerate one another in the very least degree, but in going back to their quarters loudly accused each other of having stolen the watch, of having been afraid to keep it, and of having "hev it 'way in de woods to 'vent 'scovery!"

The harassed inmates of Hall-in-Umbra went early to bed on this evening, and, for a wonder, slept undisturbed by any sort of apparition, and awoke to the discovery of no mysterious losses.

It is true that Hyacinth had taken the precaution to put her watch and chain between the mattress on which she slept, and where she found them safe the next morning.

This was Sunday; but as it was pouring rain, no one thought of going to church.

Mr. Goodwin conducted a family worship in the long

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drawing-room, where all the household, including the outdoor servants, were gathered.

The Goodwins remained one more week at Hall-in-Umbra, but experienced no more supernatural disturbances.

They left on Saturday morning. At parting with Miss Orkney the old squire said:

"I think that we must have exorcised the spooks, Ora! Not one has visited the house since our arrival, or, I should say, during our sojourn. If they should reappear and give you any trouble, just let me know, and we will come and spend another week or ten days with you. Good-by!"

And he gave Ora and Bevvie each a paternal kiss.

"If the day should be fine to-morrow—and I hope it will be—we shall see you at church," said Hyacinth, clinging to the hand of her hostess as though loth to let it go and to leave her.

"Oh, yes; certainly, if the weather should permit, Bevvie and myself will surely go to church. Is it not strange that it has rained every Sunday since our arrival? But it cannot keep on so forever, and let us hope that to-morrow will be clear and we shall meet."

"And mind, if you come to church, you are also to come home and dine with us. Do you hear, Miss Orkney?" demanded the old squire, as he handed his daughter into the family carriage that had been sent over for them that morning.

"Yes, I hear you; and I thank you, Squire Goodwin. We shall dine with you with great pleasure; but, as I explained before, we cannot stay overnight, on account of the baby."

"But, child, alive, bring the baby along with you!"

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"But we are going to church, and we cannot take the baby there, for the whole morning, you know.'

"Ah, true! Well, some time you will come, with all the family, and stay a few weeks. We will live in hope of that. Good-by!" said the squire, as he sprang into the carriage, and seated himself beside his daughter.

Jeff, the old coachman, touched his hat to the ladies on the piazza, cracked his whip, and started his horses.

Ora and Bevvie watched the carriage out of sight, and then returned within doors.

"Ora," said Bevvie, "you will now shut up the long bedroom. You will never use it again, will you?"

"I shall have that room prepared for me to-day, and I shall take possession of it again to-night," said Ora.

CHAPTER VI

ORA'S SECOND ADVENTURE IN THE HAUNTED CHAMBER

It was in vain that Bevvie tried to dissuade her benefactress from the settled purpose of occupying that long room whence so many mysterious disturbances had proceeded. Miss Orkney was as firm as a rock.

She took Rachel and Betsy both into that chamber, for the two negro women were afraid to venture there even in broad daylight without company, and she remained ostensively to direct them in preparing the apartment for her use.

The servants worked diligently, for they were anxious to get away from the uncanny scene; and when at length all the young lady's own effects were restored to their proper receptacles and everything placed in perfect or-

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der, they gladly made their escape into other parts of the house.

As night approached, Bevvie began again to "plead, lament, and sue" to Ora not to sleep alone in the haunted chamber.

"Indeed, Ora, if you do persist in this foolhardy resolution, I shall not be able to close my eyes to-night! And my anxiety for you will make me ill. I am sure it will!" argued Bevvie.

"Look here, my dear child, if you are going to be so foolish as all that, I cannot help it! Do you suppose, Bevvie, that I am to be driven out of the best room in the house by 'disturbances'? No! I have resolved to solve the mystery of these same disturbances, and I will do it! I have taken this position in regard to this matter; and, as I said before, I am a soldier's daughter and cannot abandon my post!" replied Ora.

"I know that you will be crazed or killed, all through your own obstinacy! You cannot contend with all the powers of darkness!" cried Bevvie, almost in hysterics.

"Nonsense, my dear! 'Powers of darkness,' indeed! You talk as if you were living in the dark ages! Come, now, drop the subject! I am weary of it all," concluded Ora.

Bevvie was silenced for the present.

But when bedtime came and they were standing together in the upper hall, ready to bid each other good night, Bevvie renewed her prayers to Ora with more passionate earnestness than ever; but, ah! with no better success.

At length, Ora, to escape further solicitations, hastily kissed her protégé, went into the long room, and bolted the door.

The cheerful apartment looked like what it had been

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intended for—the guest chamber, the best room in the house, kept for company, and not at all like a haunted place.

Two kerosene lamps were lighted on the mantelpiece opposite the door by which Ora had entered; and two wax candles were lighted in the brackets on the dressing bureau that stood between the two front windows.

These, with the white draperies about the room, and the bright Turkey rugs on the floor, made everything look very cheerful.

Ora went through her nightly task of precautionary and exhaustive searching to make sure that there was no one in the room, and of careful fastenings to secure the apartment from intrusion.

Finally, with the memory of Hyacinth's watch in her mind, she put away her trinkets and her clothing, as she laid them off, in one of the closets, then locked the door, and hid the key.

"I do not know why I should take this precaution, since there is no thief in the room now, and it is utterly impossible that any should get into it to-night," she said to herself, as she extinguished all her lights except one kerosene lamp, and turned the flame of that low.

Then she said her prayers and went to bed; but she could not sleep.

She lay there with eyes wide open, while her sight gradually accommodated itself to the semi-darkness, in which the objects of the room came out slowly into view.

Then she closed her eyes, and tried to sleep; but in vain. She raised herself, shook up her pillow, shifted her position, lay down, and tried again, but with no better success.

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She repeated to herself the favorite poetry that she knew by rote; but it failed of the desired effect.

Finally, toward morning, whn she had ceased to seek sleep, sleep, the capricious, came to her and steeped all her senses in oblivion.

Several hours of utter unconsciousness must have passed before she was roused from a deep and dreamless slumber by a loud knocking at her door.

She started up in bed, and tried to collect her senses, while the voice of Bevvie called at the door:

"Ora! Ora! What has happened to you? Are you alive? Are you awake? Oh, answer! Or I shall have the door broken open with an ax!"

"Yes!" cried Miss Orkney; "I am alive and awake! What in the world are you making such an uproar at my door for? Are you quite crazed, Bevvie?"

"I—I thought something had happened to you. It is ever so late! After eight o'clock! I could not stand it any longer. I had to knock to find out if you were safe. And, oh! you were so hard to wake, Ora," said Bevvie apologetically.

"I could not get to sleep until near morning; and I suppose I slept heavily," replied Ora, rising and staggering toward the door to open it, for she was still only half awake.

"Now, then; you see that I am all right. Come in," said Ora.

"Oh, no, I can't come in; indeed, I can't; please don't ask me, Ora."

"Well, then, stay out, Bevvie, dear."

"But I am so glad you are all right, Ora."

"Thank you, dear. Of course I am all right. Why should I not be all right? But as you will not enter the room, you must let me shut the door and dress myself."

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"Of course, Ora. Oh, I'm so glad you are safe!" exclaimed Bevvie, as she retreated.

"Foolish child!" muttered Miss Orkney, as she closed the door and went up the room to open the front window shutters.

Then morning sunshine streamed into the chamber, and then—what a scene met her view!

Had Satan and all his imps been at work?

The chairs were at "sixes and sevens" all over the floor; the Persian rugs were tossed here and there; the tidies were flung about; the towels were scattered; the soap dish and tooth brushes were lying on the hearth; the toilet pincushion was at the foot of the bureau; and, in short, everything about the room was in the utmost confusion.

Ora stood transfixed in the midst of the scene and gazed around on the chaos in a state of stupefaction. Then she rubbed her eyes, and looked again, asking herself:

"Can this be real? Can I be awake? And in my right mind? This seems to be myself! And this my room! But—good heavens! what has happened in it? Who has done all this? And how could the disorganizer have entered through barred and bolted doors and windows? Can there be such things as supernatural agencies, after all? Steady—steady—I must not let imagination get the better of my reason. This is mysterious—this is inexplicable. But I must not lose my self-command; and, above all, I must not let my silly darling, Bevvie, know what has happened. How thankful I am that she did not enter this room! That was for the best, at any rate. But I must bolt the door to keep her out, lest she should change her mind and want

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to come in. And then I must reduce this chaos to order before any one can find it out."

And Miss Orkney went and shot the bolt of the door, and not too soon, for Bevvie was approaching from the other side to peep in.

"Ora!" she called.

"What do you want, Bevvie?" inquired Miss Orkney, as soon as she had secured the door.

"I want to know how soon you will be ready for breakfast?"

"In half an hour."

"Not sooner?"

"No; and not so soon, unless you will let me do what I have got to do now."

"Well, go on and make haste. I will not interrupt you again."

"You need not. I will go down just as soon as I am ready," replied Miss Orkney, as Bevvie left the door.

Ora went softly and deftly to work, picked up the chairs and set them in their places, and picked up the tidies and hung them over their backs, gathered up the little articles of the toilet and laid them in order, and lastly began to spread down the Persian rugs where they belonged.

Then it was that she first missed something. Her brightest Persian rug, the one that always lay before her dressing bureau, was gone.

She looked all over the room, in both closets, under the bed, and in every nook and corner; but she could not find it. It was not like the little gold watch that might have been hidden in any small crevice. It was a thick, five feet square rug, not easily put out of sight in such a room as that, with windows full of light.

It could not be found there. It had been carried off.

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But carried off by whom?

Why, clearly by the same being that had thrown all the furniture of the room into chaos.

But what was that being? Whence had it come? How had it entered the closed and barred and bolted room?

How had it departed without opening doors or windows? And whither had it gone?

"Steady—steady," said Ora to herself again. "I must not lose my head over all this. I must look upon it as the practical joke of some successful juggler. And, above all, I must keep my counsel, and not let the secret of my night's mystery get abroad. Bevvie, for one, will go crazy if she should hear of any more supernatural disturbances. I must be discreet and cool."

So saying, Ora dressed herself and left the room, and, after locking the door behind her and putting the key in her pocket, she went downstairs to breakfast.

"And now, at last, we have got a lovely day, you will be too late to go to church, Ora," was Bevvie's greeting, as her benefactress appeared.

"Yes. I am very sorry, Bevvie. It is not my fault, dear. We will have family prayers in the drawing-room," said Ora very meekly, for she felt really troubled by the fact of her long absence from public worship.

"Well, never mind. We will now be likely to have a long succession of clear Sundays, so that we may go to church regularly," remarked Bevvie, by way of consolation.

"Still, I begin to think that we should not have stayed home so long on account of the weather. And henceforth I mean to go, rain or shine," replied Ora.

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"Unless you lie awake all night and oversleep yourself in the morning."

"I will not oversleep myself again on Sunday morning, whether I lie awake at night or not. I will give orders to be called at six o'clock every Sunday morning, and, whether it rains or shines, I will go to church! Bevvie, I begin to hunger for the bread of life!"

"Very well. You know I am not afraid of bad weather. But, tell me now, what sort of a night did you pass?"

"A sleepless one until near morning. Then I fell into profound slumber, which lasted until you aroused me with your knocking."

"I beg your pardon, Ora; but, indeed, it was so much beyond your usual hour of rising that I became alarmed! But—did you really pass the night without being disturbed in any way?"

"Yes; I assure you. I passed it just as I have told you," replied Miss Orkney, glad that she could answer truly without telling of the confusion in which she had found her room on waking.

At this moment Old Charley entered with a waiter, on which were arranged the dishes cooked for breakfast. He began to arrange them on the table; while Aunt Nelie followed him, bringing the coffee pot in one hand and the cream jug in the other.

Old Charley completed his part of the work and withdrew; but Nelie, after setting the coffee pot and cream jug on the table, stood still.

"You need not stay, Nelie. We can wait on ourselves," said Miss Orkney, as she took her seat at the head of the table.

"Yes, young mist'ess; but I wanted to speak to yer, if yer please, ma'am," replied Nelie.

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"Well, go on; what is it?" inquired the young lady, as she poured out the coffee.

"'Bout dat Durham cow, mist'ess, as yer said yer wanted her milk saved for yer own table."

"Yes; well?"

"Well, mist'ess, yer has had dat cow's milk ebery ebenin' for tea; but yer hasn' had it for breakfas' for mos' a week."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"She nebber has no milk in de mornin'."

"No milk in the morning? Why not?"

"I dunno, mist'ess. Fuss, I t'ought how it mought be accidental like; but now I'se 'cline' to fink as somebody mus' milk her."

"That is very strange! Who could do such a thing?"

"Lor' knows, mist'ess, less it's dem low-libe town nig——"

"Now, Nelie, no more of that. The nurse and the housemaid sleep in the house here, and never leave it in the morning until their duties are done. You are the first one to see the cow in the morning, and therefore you must know that they cannot have done it."

"'Pears not, mist'ess, indeed. But dere's nobody else 'cept me and old man Cha'ly, an' he can't 'bide milk; an' lors knows I didn't do it! An' den we ain't got no neighbors nigh us, neider."

"You and Charley must watch, and try to find out the thief. One of you might rise at daybreak and go out in the barnyard and hide, and wait to see the result."

"Yes, mist'ess; me an' Cha'ley'll bofe get up in the dark o' dawn an' go watch togedder. We'd be 'feared to go by ourse'fs," said Nelie, who occupied her hands while she talked in passing the coffee, rolls, and other edibles of the breakfast table.

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"Go and tell Charley and the other servants that I shall hold service in the drawing-room this morning, and I wish them all to attend in their Sunday suits. Do you hear?"

"Yes, mist'ess," said Nelie, as she left the room.

"Now, who can steal that cow's morning milk?" inquired Bevvie.

"I must give up trying to solve conundrums. It takes up too much time," answered Ora.

"Perhaps they will catch the thief to-morrow morning."

"Perhaps."

Miss Orkney's laconic answers did not encourage conversation, and so the remainder of the meal was passed in silence.

Then Ora arose and went into the long drawing-room to make preparations for family worship.

The household servants were punctual to the hour, and put in an appearance exactly as the hall clock was on the stroke of eleven.

Their number was augmented by the addition of two other old negroes—Jenny and Judy, the aged centenarians who lived in a log cabin on the edge of the woods of Umbra. Aunt Jenny, the mother, was aged 117 years. Aunt Judy, the daughter, 101. Both being over 100, the trifling difference of 16 years in their ages was not at all apparent in their persons. They were so much alike as to be almost counterparts.

They were two of the smallest, thinnest, blackest, and most withered of women—their skin reminding the beholder of Indian walnut shells. They were dressed alike, in gayly striped cotton gowns, and bright bandana handkerchiefs tied over their heads. They came in side

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by side, stooping very much over the canes with which they supported themselves.

On seeing them enter, Ora left her seat behind the table—where the Bible and prayer books lay—and came to meet and welcome them.

She gave to each a seat in a comfortable arm chair, on the right and left of her own reading table, so that they might hear.

They were both very childish, and nodded and smiled, and chatted unintelligibly, as they took the places assigned them.

Then Ora opened the Sabbath morning services, she reading the prayers, and Bevvie leading the responses.

Then she read the Sermon on the Mount.

Finally she gave out a hymn, in the singing of which all the colored people joined with melodious though untrained voices.

This concluded the exercises, and Ora dismissed her little congregation—directing Nelie and Charley to take charge of the two aged women, keep them for the day, and make them comfortable.

After an early dinner, Ora and Bevvie went to sit on the front piazza and enjoy the genial warmth of that early October afternoon.

The baby was with them, in its little carriage, and they were talking of its growth and rapid development when they were surprised by the arrival of a messenger from Mr. Goodwin.

The man rode up to the horse block, dismounted, tied his horse, and came up, bowing to the two ladies.

"Well, Jerome?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Please, miss, Marse Tomfilius sent his 'spectful compliments, as he 'spected to see yer at church dis mornin' an' hopes yer's well."

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"Very well, thank you. And your master's family?"

"Dey's all well, miss."

"Have you had dinner, Jerome?"

"No, mistress; Marse Tomfilius wouldn't leave me stop for no dinner."

"Well, then, take your horse to the stable, and then go into the kitchen and join the servants at their table. They have just begun to dine."

"T'anky, miss."

"And when you are ready to go home, come to me, and I will give you a message to your master."

"Yes, miss," replied the man, with a bow, as he led his horse away.

"Mr. Goodwin thinks something very serious has happened to us," said Bevvie.

"I suppose so," replied Ora.

An hour later, the messenger, having refreshed himself and his horse, rode up for his last orders.

"Tell your master," said Miss Orkney, "that I thank him for his kindness; that we are all perfectly well here, and that the reason that we failed to keep our appointment with him was that after a sleepless night I overslept myself this morning. Can you remember that?"

"Oh, yes, miss," replied Jerome, as he rode away.

As it was now growing chilly, Ora took up the baby and re-entered the house, followed by Bevvie.

Then Rachel came and took the child to feed him and put him to bed. Ora and Bevvie had an early tea, spent the evening in reading in the oak parlor, and at ten o'clock called Old Charley to fasten up the house, and went upstairs to retire for the night.

"Well, I don't feel half so bad about your sleeping in that room now," said Bevvie, as she kissed her benefactress good night.

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Ora laughed, returned her kiss, and passed into her own chamber, thinking:

"If she only knew all, she would feel worse."

Ora searched her room as thoroughly and secured it as safely as she had done on the preceding night. She extinguished all her lights except one kerosene lamp, and that she left burning brightly.

Finally she said her prayers and went to bed.

She expected to have to lie awake for hours, as she had done on the preceding night.

But to-night she was more fortunate; and soon after she lay down she fell into a sound sleep that lasted until morning, and might have lasted longer had she not been violently startled out of it by a succession of loud screams.

Springing out of bed, frightened, yet but half awake, dazed with being suddenly torn out of a state of unconscious repose into this mêlée of noise and confusion, Ora stood in the middle of the floor in the still dark room and tried to collect her faculties.

Ear-splitting screams and rushing footsteps approached her own door. She ran and opened it.

The light from the front hall window almost dazzled her sight, but she discerned the terrified group without —Nelie, Charley, Rachel, and Betsy huddled together, and Bevvie standing in her own doorway.

They were no longer screaming, but they were standing there very much excited, and panting for breath.

"What is the matter? What is all this about?" demanded Miss Orkney.

No one seemed inclined to answer. They looked from one to the other in piteous terror.

"Will no one speak?" demanded the young lady.

"Oh, Cha'ly! You tell her," pleaded Nelie.

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"Oh, I can't, honey! I can't, indeed! You tell her, honey! Please do!" pleaded Charley, in his turn.

"Bevvie," exclaimed Ora, "do you know what has frightened these idiots out of the little sense they ever possessed?"

"No, indeed, I do not. I only know that they have frightened me nearly out of my life," answered Bevvie, whose face was now as white as her wrapper.

"Rachel," then said Miss Orkney, "you have a reputation for good sense. Tell me the meaning of all this."

"I do not know, miss! Indeed, I don't! I was in the room 'long o' Miss Bevvie, w'en them two" (pointing to Charley and Nelie) "came screaming up de sta'rs."

"Doan ax her, young mist'ess. Doan ax dat town nig —cullud pussin, I mean! She doan know! I'll tell yer, mist'ess! I gwine tell yer soon's I kin get my breff! Listen, honey!" said Old Charley.

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CHAPTER VII

THE WONDER GROWS

Deeper, deeper let us toil
In the mines of knowledge;
Nature's wealth and learning's spoil
Win from school and college;
Delve we there for richer gems
Than the stars of diadems.

Onward, onward may we press
Through the path of glory,
Virtue is true happiness,
Excellent its story.
Minds are of celestial birth,
Make we, then, a heaven of earth.

—MONTGOMERY.

"Now, THEN, Uncle Charley!" briskly exclaimed Miss Orkney, by way of spurring up the old negro's hesitating tongue and flagging spirits.

"Yes, mist'ess! Yes, honey! Jes' lemmy 'cover ob my breff, chile!" gasped the old man.

"Well?"

"Well, den, young mist'ess, you 'members how sister Nelie 'formed yer yisdy mornin' 'bout de mornin's milk bein' missed 'way from de Drum cow?"

"The Durham. Yes."

"Well, an' yer know, mist'ess, how we spicioned how some o' dese yere low-libe, riffraff, po' w'ite trash done milk dat Drum cow ebery mornin' fo' we dem was up?"

"Yes."

"An' den yer 'members, young mist'ess, how yer guv

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orders to me an' sister Nelie as we was to go an' watch for de riffraff rogues, and try to 'scover who dey wur?"

"I remember."

"Well, young mist'ess, we 'beyed orders. Soon 'sever I open my eyes dis mornin' I say to myself, I say—leastways I say to my two looking eyes, I say—'Now, you two lookin' eyes ob Mr. Charles Sampson, de berry fus' fing as you got to look for is dem yere riffraff rogues wot milks de Drum cow 'fo' day ebery mornin'; dat's wot you's got to do.' 'Deed I did, young mist'ess! Dat's wot I say to my two eyes 'fo' dey was fairly open. 'Deed it's de trufe!'

"Yes; well?"

"Den, my young mist'ess, I rise up outen my bed, an' hardly daylight, an' went an' knock at sister Nelie's do', an' I say, 'Sister Nelie,' I say, 'it am time for me an' you to go an' watch for dem yere riffraff rogues wot milks de Drum cow in de mornin' 'fo' day,' I say. 'Deed I did, mist'ess! Yer b'liebes me, doan yer?"

"Yes, yes! Go on!"

"Well, den, honey, sister Nelie she open de do' sudden an' say, 'Who yer finks a fool, or a sluggard, eider? I dun been up dis half hour.' An' sho nuff, so she had; and she was already dress'. And so, mist'ess, we two went out de kitchen do', an' eberyt'ing mos' dark as pitch, an' nuffin' 'tall stirrin'. An' we went out to de barnyard, an' dere were de Drum cow by herse'f. All de res' ob de cows an' calfs is in de cuppin" (cow pen). "You knows dat, I s'pose, mist'ess?"

"Yes; hurry on."

"Well, den, me an' sister Nelie we jes' goes an' hides ourse'fs 'hind de big wagon, an' watches fur de riffraff rogue, an' we sat dere wrap' up well as we could, an' it a-growin' a little lighter all de time. By 'n' by, gradual

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like, we hears somefin' rustlin' froo de yard. An' den—oh, Lor', mist'ess! Oh, Lor', mist'ess!"

"Come, come, Uncle Charley! be a man!"

"Oh, Lor', yes, mist'ess! but w'en a man sees de debbil, or de debbil's imps, how den?"

"What did you see?"

"Oh, mist'ess! Oh, mist'ess! W'ile me an' sister Nelie sat dar, a-watchin', an' de dawn jes' a-reddenin' up in de low part ob de sky w'ich yer call de horridsin, dere comes right across de barnyard, wid a hop, skip an' jump, dat same said debbil's imp wot met me at night in de woods ob Umb'a! An' it went on all fours an' right up to de Drum cow, an' dere, right afore our two lookin' eyes, it milked her!"

"Milked the cow?"

"Yes, my young mist'ess; milked de Drum cow! Milked her wid its awful mouf, jes' like any calf! Leastways, so it did begin to milk her, for me an' sister Nelie nebber stopped to see no more, but runned inter de house fas' as ebber we could come."

"Instead of seizing the creature and detaining it, as you should have done!"

"Oh, my young mist'ess! who can seize de debbil, or de debbil's imps? Who want to lie struck down dead wid a shock f'om de pit? No, mist'ess! Doan want to come to sich a en' as dat in de anshun, wen'able ole ages ob my pilg'image."

"Come, then; let us all go to the barnyard and see if the strange creature is still there—or, at least, all who will follow me. But wait one moment," said Ora, as she disappeared in her bedroom to cover herself from head to foot in a large waterproof cloak.

She reappeared and challenged all to follow her, as she went down the stairs and out at the back door.

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The domestics hesitated for a moment, and then went after her, discreetly keeping a little way behind.

The sun was just rising when Ora reached the barnyard.

There she found the Durham cow, standing quite alone.

Then she called her followers to come into the inclosure and search.

Fortified by their own numbers, they took "heart of grace" and entered.

Led on and encouraged by their mistress, they investigated every nook and corner of the barnyard, and then of the barn buildings; but their search was utterly unsuccessful in the discovery of "debbils" or "debbil's imps."

And at last they gave over, and returned to the house.

Ora had come to one conclusion—that the mysterious disturber of her tenants, the Kemptons; the "awful presence" that had terrified Bevvie out of her senses; the "nocturnal visitor" that had startled herself in the haunted room; the "apparition" that had appalled Old Charley in the woods of Umbra, and the "debbil's imp" that had milked the Durham cow, formed but one being, and that being a creature of flesh and blood.

And she had also come to one resolution—to seize that creature with her hands when next her eyes beheld it.

She said nothing of this opinion or of this purpose to her household.

On the contrary, on re-entering her doors she called them all into her presence, and spoke as follows:

"You know that I very seldom issue a command, and therefore I hope that this which I give you will be strictly obeyed. It is, that you do not again allude to this

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strange subject in this house. Now go, each of you, to your proper work."

The domestics dispersed; but if they obeyed their mistress by keeping silence in the house, they made up for that reserve by indulging in very long-winded and much exaggerated stories of the specter in the neighborhood.

A few more days passed, and there were no more disturbances by day or night.

There was no more stealing of the Durham cow's morning milk. The "debbil's imp" was evidently "a delicate spirit," easily frightened away.

So thought Miss Orkney, who was confirmed in her resolution to seize it, if ever she should awake and find it in her room again.

It happened that on a certain Thursday night Ora and Bevvie sat up later than usual in the oak parlor to finish reading a fascinating old novel of the last century, which Bevvie had rooted out of a box of rubbish in the attic.

It was the "Black Penitents," a blood-curdling, marrow-freezing, hair-raising romance of love, murder, and remorse; and, after holding them under its spell to the wee sma' hours, sent them shuddering to bed.

As usual, the two girls parted in the upper hall, between their opposite bedroom doors.

"I am glad I have got Rachel and the baby to sleep in the room with me; but I am very sorry for you, Ora. I wish you would have Betsy or Nelie to sleep on a cot in your room," said Bevvie at parting.

"My dear, they would throw up their places before they would consent to stay with me in the 'haunted room,'" replied Ora.

"And yet you sleep in there quite alone!"

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"But I am not afraid."

"No; you are not afraid. But I am afraid that some morning we shall find you frozen stiff with terror, like that girl in the boarding school who was frightened to death by a skeleton."

"What girl?"

"Why, don't you know there was a boarding school kept by the widow of a doctor, and there was a skeleton strung on wires in his office; and the girls knew of it somehow; and there was one girl who always boasted that she could not be frightened by anything.

"So one day this brave girl was let go and spend a day with some relations who had come to take her out.

"And while she was gone, what did these dreadful school girls do but manage to take down that skeleton, and wind it up in the mosquito bar at the head of that brave girl's bed.

"So when she got home that night, it was late; but the mischievous girls were lying awake in their little rooms, waiting and listening for the effect of their practical joke.

"And they heard her come up and go into her little room, where she slept alone, and not with another girl, as all the others did.

"And they laughed and listened, and soon they heard her lock her door and jump into bed.

"And then they heard a shriek—such a shriek! And they laughed and laughed and laughed, to think how they had frightened the 'heroine,' and how they would rally her the next morning.

"And then they listened; but not another word came from that chamber of doom; only that terrible shriek had rung through the house and awakened the mistress

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and some of the teachers and the servants; and all came rushing to the spot.

"And then the culprits held their breaths, and pretended to be very, very sound asleep, and very, very hard to wake when the mistress knocked at one door after the other, to ask what was the matter.

"Finding, at length, that nothing was the matter in any of the double-bedded rooms, she knocked at the door of Miss Nichols' room, but got no answer. And after knocking and calling in the loudest manner for a long time, the mistress became convinced that there was something wrong in that room, so she took her pass key, pushed the door key out till it fell on the floor, put the pass key in the lock, and opened the door and went in, followed by all the teachers and the servants.

"And then there was a chorus of shrieks! for oh! what a sight of horror met their view! There on the bed lay the girl, stone dead, and across her breast the long, bony arms of the skeleton that had fallen upon her, from the jar made when she jumped into bed."

"That was a horrible story! Were the culprits punished, do you know?"

"It was a true, true story; but whether the culprits were ever discovered even, I do not know; but the moral I wish to impress upon you is this—not to be so foolhardy!"

"Nonsense, my dear! I am not a school girl, nor should I have been any more frightened by the skeleton of a human being than the skeleton of an umbrella. As for the rest, if any one should venture to play a practical joke upon me, I should give them reason to repent it all the days of their life," said Ora seriously, as she kissed Bevvie good night, and retired within her own room.

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CHAPTER VIII

ORA'S LAST ADVENTURE

THERE Miss Orkney went through her nightly routine of careful searching and careful fastening.

Then, taking her watch to wind it up, she was surprised to see it was half-past two o'clock.

She extinguished all her lights but that of one kerosene lamp, turned the flame of that down low, and got into bed. She was soon asleep.

She must have slept profoundly for several hours, for when at length she awoke it was with a feeling of renewed life, as of one who had had her sleep out, was quite refreshed, and ready to rise.

The long room was dimly lighted by the little ring of blue flame crowning the kerosene lamp; the two tall front windows, with their fast closed shutters and long, white dimity curtains, were faintly visible, as was also the dressing bureau, surmounted by its tall mirror, that stood between them—but—

Heaven of heavens! What was that standing so motionless before the glass?

Was it spiritual? Human? Bestial? What was it? A thing of air, earth, or water?

It was a shapeless, monstrous, hideous thing! not like the elfin creature that had danced, whirled, floated, soared, dived and flown, in that same room, some weeks before.

Ora shuddered as she watched it. Yet she kept to her resolution to seize the creature, and to hold it if she could.

To do this, she felt she must be very, very cautious, so

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as not to startle it, and frighten it away, though how it could escape she could not imagine.

She summoned all her courage, slipped silently out of bed, and stepped softly, in her bare feet, over the floor.

Her first thought was to turn up the flame of the kerosene lamp; but she reflected that the heightened light would surely startle the weird creature, whom she wished to creep upon and surprise.

Softly, slowly, silently, she glided up the room, until she was within arm's length of the creature; one mute step nearer and she put out her hands to seize the shapeless monster, when it turned suddenly upon her and—

Ora fell to the floor, as a rushing as of the wind passed over her.

She was not hurt by her fall; she was amazed! But soon she collected her faculties, gathered herself up, arose, and looked about her.

The room was empty of any living creature besides herself.

She stood where she had risen, and clasped her temples in a state of perplexity bordering on insanity.

Then, with a strong effort, she resolved upon her course of action.

She went and slipped her feet into her slippers, and then she turned up the light of the kerosene lamp, and also lighted the other lamp, and both the wax candles, until the room was in a blaze of light.

And in this full radiance, she searched every nook and corner of the apartment, and examined the fastenings of every window and door, and found all secure as she had left them when she went to bed, and no sign of an intruder anywhere to be seen.

How had the mysterious creature again entered the room, and how escaped from it, through barred and

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bolted doors and windows? Where had it come from? Where had it gone? And, above all, what was it?

Ora could not answer these questions even by a conjecture. But she formed one grim resolution:

"Since this creature eludes all our vigilance, escapes even from my hands, and floors me by a power that I do not understand, I will try what virtue there may be in powder and shot, and henceforth I will keep a loaded revolver under my pillow, and shoot the monster the next time I find it in my room."

Miss Orkney felt much better after she had come to this resolution, and she went and opened her blinds, and, finding the whole eastern horizon ablaze with the rising sun, she put out all her lights and began to dress herself.

Meantime, she heard her neighbors in the next room getting up.

They all soon met at the breakfast table in the oak parlor.

Neither Ora's countenance nor manner betrayed any sign of her adventure. Yet Bevvie suddenly asked her:

"Ora, did you knock a chair, or a table, or anything over in your room this morning?"

"No, Bevvie; I did not."

"Did not knock anything over?"

"No."

"Nor let anything fall?"

"No, Bevvie; no!"

"Well, then, that is another mystery. For I do declare to you that I heard something fall in your room. Are you sure nothing fell there?"

"Eat your breakfast, Bevvie!" said Miss Orkney, seeing that she could not answer this question truly without betraying an incident in her adventure.

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"Well, since you didn't knock anything over, or let anything fall, I don't know what to make of it, I am sure," replied Bevvie, as she devoted herself to her rice cakes.

The breakfast was finished in peace.

But before the day was over, Ora made a most unpleasant discovery. Her India camel's hair shawl was gone. It was an heirloom in her family. It had cost a fabulous sum of money in Calcutta, whence it had been imported as a bridal present to an ancestress of hers, and it had come down from mother and daughter for many generations.

A faithful old family servant that shawl had been. Never kept for show, but always worn for use, as if it had been the cheapest shepherd's plaid; yet it was just as good now as it had been a hundred years ago, having outlived scores of other shawls.

And now it was gone! gone! gone!

Ora could have cried over this loss, not so much for its intrinsic value—though that was great—as for its old household association. She would rather have lost her Uncle Penny's legacy, a great deal rather.

She had to suffer without sympathy, for she had determined to keep her loss a secret from the family, especially as they could in no way help her to recover it.

The shawl had been lost from her own room, during the preceding night, between the hour when she went to bed and the hour when she arose in the morning.

She was sure of this, for she had worn it when out walking on the preceding afternoon; had left it thrown over a chair in the drawing-room until she was ready to go up to bed, and had then taken it up on her arm and put it away carefully in that upper drawer. The lock

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was old and would not work; but she had shut it close and so had left it.

But, after dinner, when she went up for her shawl to put on before going out to take a walk, she found its place empty. She searched the room, as a matter of form, not with any hope of finding it, and she was not disappointed.

It never occurred to Miss Orkney to suspect any of her servants of the theft. In the first place, she knew that they were all perfectly honest; and in the second place, she knew that nothing on earth would induce one of them to enter that "haunted room" alone; and, in the third place, she knew that she had locked up the room, as she always did when she left it in the morning, and she had taken out the key and had kept it locked until she went up to prepare for her walk.

She was sure, therefore, that the servants had not taken it, but that it had been spirited away by the mysterious visitor she had found in her room—that unearthly shape—imp, witch, devil, whatever it might have been—that came and went no one knew whence or whither, in defiance of bolts and bars.

More firmly than ever she resolved to provide herself with a revolver, and the first time she should find that monstrous creature in her room, to shoot it.

Not to lose time, she determined to ride to Lower Umbra that very afternoon and buy the pistol.

She dressed herself as if for walking, locked up the "haunted room," and went downstairs to order Uncle Charley to put the pony to the chaise and prepare to drive her to the village.

"Lor' bress my po' ole brack heart, young mist'ess, gwine to start for Umber, dis time o' day!" objected the old man.

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"Yes, Uncle Charley! It is only two o'clock! And if you hurry, we can get there and return before five, and it is not dark until six," said Miss Orkney.

"'Deed, den, honey, we mus' make mons'ous good time to get froo dem yonner woods 'fo' sundown! An' I wouldn't drive froo dem dark woods arter sundown, no, not for a pile o' money high as a haystack! 'Deed it's de trufe!"

"Charley, will you go and put the pony to the chaise, or shall I have to go down to the stables and harness up myself?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Harness yerse'f up? Oh, sho', young mist'ess, who ebber heard ob a young lady harnessin' herse'f up to a pony shay? Hik—hik—hik! I gwine now, mist'ess."

And the old fellow went off laughing toward the stables.

In a very short time Old Charley drove up in the chaise.

"Where are you going to drive, Ora?" inquired Bevvie, attracted by the sound of wheels and looking out from the oak parlor window.

"To Lower Umbra, my dear."

"At this hour! Won't you be late coming home?"

"No, dear, for we shall drive fast both ways. And I would ask you to go with me, dear, only that we shall not have time to stop and rest the pony, and so it would not do to overburden him."

"No; of course not. Well, I wish you a pleasant drive; hope you will not meet Uncle Charley's 'imp' in the darkest part of the woods!" said Bevvie mischievously.

"Ow—oo!" howled Uncle Charley, at the bare suggestion. "Doan talk like dat, Miss Bevvie! Please

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doan! It's like temptin' ob—ob—ob de debbil! 'Deed it's de trufe!"

"And it is enough for the devil to tempt you without your tempting the devil, eh, Uncle Charley?"

"Yes, honey! 'Deed it's de trufe!" replied the old man quite seriously.

"Come, Uncle Charley, drive on if you wish to get home before dark," said Ora, who was now seated in the chaise.

"Lor' bring us back home safe, I prays!" muttered the old man, as he started his horse.

"But what are you going for, Ora?" called Bevvie after the retreating chaise.

"To make a little purchase, which I will show you on my return," answered Miss Orkney, as the carriage rolled out of sight among the trees of the winding wooded drive.

Bevvie threw on her shawl and hat, took up a book, came out on the porch and sat down to read; for the nurse had taken the baby out to walk, and Bevvie was really afraid to stay in the ghostly house alone, even in the daytime. It was nearly dark when Ora returned from her long drive.

"Ah! thank Heaven! You have got home safe! Any adventure on the road?" inquired Bevvie, as the carriage drew up before the door.

"No; none whatever! Not the ghost of a ghost!" replied Miss Orkney, as she alighted and left Old Charley to drive the horse around to the stables.

"Are you tired, Ora?"

"No, dear."

"Well, then, come right into the parlor. I am tired of sitting out here, this very chilly evening. I have had a fire made there, and tea is ready to go on the table.

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And, oh, Ora, show me what you have bought!" said Bevvie, as she led the way into the house, closely followed by Miss Orkney.

"Well, Mistress Curiosity, here it is," replied Ora, untying a small oblong parcel which she held in her hands, and revealing a mahogany case.

"What is it? Work box, jewel casket, or what?" inquired Bevvie.

"I will show you," replied Ora, putting the case on the table, taking a little key from her pocket book, unlocking the case, and displaying a pair of small, elegantly mounted pistols.

Bevvie started back with a half-suppressed shriek.

Ora took out one of the pistols and began to examine it.

"Oh, don't! Oh, don't!" cried Bevvie, poising on the eve of flight.

"Why, it isn't loaded!" exclaimed Ora.

"Yes, it is! Yes, it is! They are always loaded! always! I should think any fool would know that just by reading the newspapers! See how many people are shot to death by pistols and guns that were 'not loaded' before the trigger was pulled, but somehow or other were loaded when it was pulled! Oh, do lock the horrid thing up in its case again!"

"But, Bevvie, dear, before we go to bed I am going to load both these pistols, and put one under my pillow and the other under yours, as a protection against——"

"No, you won't, indeed, Ora! You won't put a pistol in my room! I am more afraid of pistols than I am of burglars, spirits, or old Satan himself!" hastily interrupted Bevvie.

Miss Orkney made no reply to this, but replaced her revolver, locked the case, and set it on a side table.

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Then she threw off her hat and jacket and drew a chair up to the cheery wood fire, to wait until tea should be brought in.

After supper, when the service was cleared away, Ora again brought forward her mahogany case, and prepared to load her revolvers.

"As if there were not already terrible things enough in the house, but you must bring in these!" cried Bevvie, in disgust and abhorrence, as she beat a hasty retreat from the room.

Ora, when her task was completed, took the pistols up to her chamber, placed one under her pillow, and left the other in its case, for no argument or entreaty could induce Bevvie to have one near her; and Ora, seeing her nervousness on the subject, desisted from trying to overcome her objections.

Fortified by her resolution, and armed with the revolver, Ora went fearlessly to bed, and slept undisturbed.

CHAPTER IX

"A WHISPER BROKE THE AIR"

THE second Sunday in October dawned brightly and beautifully.

Ora arose with the sun and met Bevvie at an early breakfast table.

"Now, at last, we can go to church," said the latter, as the two young women sipped their coffee.

"Yes, at last," said Ora, whose thoughts were busy with the anticipation of meeting once more the friends of her family, the intimates of her childhood—the Ar-

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lingtons, the Colvilles, the Farnsworths—old country people who had come over with her people at the time of the first settlement of the country, and whose friendships had lasted from that time to this.

It is true that none of these had called on the orphan heiress to welcome her back to the home of her forefathers; but, then, when Ora had first returned, in August, many of these neighbors had been absent at the White Sulphur Springs; and when they had returned to their homes, in the month of September, a succession of equinoctial storms had so washed all thoroughfares as to render traveling over cross-country roads difficult or impossible.

October had brought better weather, but it was as yet early in the month—time enough for the old friends of her family to call on her and redeem their credit.

In the meantime she should now see them all at church—the sacred place of neighborly reunion.

"I must order the pony chaise to be brought around for us," said Miss Orkney, as she arose to ring the bell.

"Oh, sit still! Don't you trouble yourself. I saw Uncle Charley, and directed him, in your name, to get himself, the pony, and the chaise ready to start with us, at eight o'clock, for church. I knew that old beau would require some time to 'shine' his shoes, and tie his cravat, and get himself up generally to fascinate his lady friends at church!" said Bevvie, laughing.

"I am glad you gave the order so early; and now, if you have finished breakfast, we will go and get our bonnets on. It is now a quarter to eight," said Miss Orkney, as she arose from the table and led the way upstairs.

It required but ten minutes for these young women to prepare themselves for church.

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At the end of that time they came down to the front door, before which they found the pony chaise standing, with Uncle Charley on the driver's seat, in a high-crowned hat, deep-caped coat, and a voluminous red neck scarf.

After giving many charges to Rachel in regard to the baby, and to Nelie in regard to the house, the two young friends entered the pony chaise.

Uncle Charley started the horse and they left Hall-in-Umbra at a good rate of speed.

The long drive through the deep woods that bright Sabbath morning was very pleasant. Even more delightful was the drive along the west bank of the river, until they reached the ferry where the flatboat awaited to take them across to the little hamlet of Lower Umbra.

Ora was plunged in deep meditation.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Bevvie, while they were crossing the river.

"To be frank with you, then, dear, I was just wondering which was the keeping and which the breaking of the Sabbath."

"In what way? I don't understand."

"Why, in this way: The commandment says of the Sabbath day that we are to keep it holy, to do no work. Here: 'In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle.' These are the words! And here are the actions: We work this pony hard to-day to take us to and from church. All the Christians on the other side—our side of the river—work the ferryman hard all day Sunday to take them across the river on their way to and from church. I tell you, Bevvie, it is a question

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worth considering whether we do not keep the Sabbath better by staying at home and reading the Bible than by making man and horse work laboriously to take us to church."

"Well," said Bevvie, "when a question like that arises, and we hardly know which course is right, it seems safe to do as our Christian fathers and mothers did before us."

The landing of the ferryboat on the east side of the river, and the little bustle of the debarkation prevented the necessity of a reply.

Old Charley started his horse at a good pace up the main street of the village, and soon reached the little church of St. Luke, which was at its farthest or northern end.

The church, a small Gothic building of old red sandstone, half covered with ivy, stood in the midst of a spacious, shaded yard, surrounded by a grove, in which several carriages were waiting and many saddle horses were tethered.

Old Charley drew up under the shade of a large elm tree, whose leaves were just turning in the early autumn frost.

The two young women got out, Charley tied his pony, and then the three went into the church together.

The building was well filled, but the service not yet commenced.

Old Charley turned to the right and went up the stairs leading to the colored people's gallery, while Miss Orkney and her companion went up the middle aisle and turned to the right to enter the large corner pew that had been occupied time out of mind by her father's family and their ancestors.

On entering their pew, the two young women knelt,

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as was the custom, and offered up each a short, silent prayer, then arose, took their seats, and waited for the services to commence.

A swift and swiftly withdrawn glance over the congregation assured Ora that all her old family friends were present.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Arlington and their three middle-aged maiden daughters; there were old Mr. and Mrs. Colville and their five granddaughters, all grown-up girls from twenty to thirty years of age; there were Mrs. Farnsworth, her sister and her niece.

And there were also many other friends and acquaintances of less intimacy.

She could not know whether any of these old friends saw or recognized her presence in the church.

And now the services commenced and claimed all her attention.

Mr. Goodwin and his daughters came in half a minute late. They occupied the large corner pew on the other side of the chancel and directly opposite her own.

She divined rather than saw their entrance. She did not look toward them; she was naturally devout, and she now gave all her thoughts to worship.

The service was long, and the sermon was still longer.

It was more than an hour after noon before the benediction was pronounced and the congregation began to disperse.

Ora and Bevvie, occupying a pew at the etxreme upper end of the church, were among the last to reach the door and leave the building.

In the shaded yard outside they found the congregation gathered into groups of friends and neighbors, exchanging greetings and discussing the news of the week.

They also found Mr. Goodwin and his five flowers

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waiting for them, drawn a little to the right of the door, so as not to block the way of the outcoming congregation.

"Here you are, my dears! I knew you would come out, this beautiful day!" exclaimed the good squire, offering a hand each to Ora and Bevvie, while Hyacinth, Jessamine, Pink, Myrtle, and Laurel crowded around them with warm welcomes.

"And you will go home with us and take dinner and stay all night?" asked Mr. Goodwin.

"Do, do, do, Ora!" chimed in all the girls.

"We will go home and dine with you very gladly, but we cannot possibly stay all night, much as we thank you, dear Mr. Goodwin," replied Ora.

"Ah! Mrs. Colville! Mrs. Colville!" exclaimed the old gentleman, stopping a portly woman in a black silk dress, and black velvet bonnet and mantle, as she was passing. "My dear lady, here is the daughter of an old friend of yours come back. I dare say she has changed so that you don't know her. But here she is—Oresta Orkney, you know."

Ora held out her hand with a smile to her father's friend; but the woman drew herself up with a freezing air, and said:

"No. I do not know and do not wish to know Miss Orkney," and passed on.

The old squire's face flushed with indignation, as Ora looked up at him with pale cheeks and questioning eyes.

"Never mind, my dear—never mind. It is not worth noticing," said Mr. Goodwin; but he took care not to expose his young neighbor to another insult by calling any one else's attention to her.

He drew her arm within his own, and led her toward

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the pony chaise, where Old Charley was already seated in his place, reins in hand, waiting for his mistress.

Bevvie and Hyacinth followed; for Hyacinth, who had seen and understood all, said that as there was a fourth seat in the chaise, she would ask Ora to allow her to occupy it.

This Hyacinth secretly intended to be an outward and visible sign of the love and faith she had for and in Ora.

In their walk from the church door to the pony chaise they passed many of Ora's old family acquaintances, but not one greeted her kindly, or even recognized her by the faintest sign. Some even drew aside with looks of scorn, and one—Mrs. Farnsworth—was overheard to say:

"I think it is shameful in a respectable man like Mr. Goodwin to notice such people! And he the father of a family of five motherless daughters, too!"

"What do they mean?" whispered Ora in her escort's ear.

"Hush! hush! my dear!" gently replied the old squire, as he put her in the chaise.

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CHAPTER X

THE WHISPER WANDERS

The gossips smiled, then nodded, and then sneer'd,
  The misses bridled and the matrons frowned;
Some hoped things might not turn out as they fear'd,
  Some would not deem such women could be found.
Some ne'er believed one-half of what they heard,
  Some looked perplexed, and other looked profound.
—Byron.

Ora Orkney sank back on her seat in the pony chaise to which Mr. Goodwin had helped her.

The squire next lifted Bevvie to the place beside her protectress.

But when he began to put Hyacinth into the carriage, Miss Orkney stretched out her hand forbiddingly, and exclaimed:

"No, no, Hyacinth! no, dearest! You must not come in here. I am not going to your house! I am not going anywhere near Welcoming!"

"Not going near Welcoming!" echoed the father and the daughter in a breath.

"No, dear friends; I am not," gravely replied Ora.

"But, dearest Ora, you promised to go," remonstrated Hyacinth.

"And why do you not keep your promise, my dear child? What has induced you to change your mind?" inquired Mr. Goodwin.

Ora reflected for a moment, and then seriously answered:

"Circumstances, which, had I known them in time,

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would have prevented my making that promise, and which now must certainly prevent my keeping it."

"To what do you allude, Oresta?" gravely inquired Mr. Goodwin.

"I think you know, dear friends. I think there is no need why I should tell you in so many words."

"I—no; I don't know!" exclaimed the squire in some hesitation and embarrassment.

"Then I must speak plainly, however painfully. It is the conduct of my old neighbors toward me to-day. They do not wish to know me. They refuse to notice me——"

"The insolent idiots!" blurted out the old man. But Ora continued:

"The words I have heard dropped as we came from the church to the carriage——"

"Venom of scorpions!" ejaculated the old man. But Ora went on:

"Even you were criticized as being careless of your reputation, and neglectful of your duties, in noticing me and permitting your daughters to do so——"

"Ora! Ora! my dear child!"

"Oh, Mr. Goodwin, I know all about it. I understand it all now, but too well."

"Ten thousand fiends!" exclaimed the squire, losing his self-control. But Ora was perfectly self-possessed, though her face was deadly pale, as she continued:

"Knowing and understanding all this, I have come to a decision. I will never enter Welcoming, and never receive you or your daughters at Hall-in-Umbra. So now, dear friends, bid me good-by here and lead Hyacinth back to your own carriage."

"May Satan fly away with me if I do! Here, Cynth! In with you!" and he hoisted his daughter into the

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chaise, and pushed her down in her seat. "And here, Charley! Out with you!" And he seized the old coachman, pulled him down to the ground, sprang into the vacated seat, and gathered the reins in his own hands.

"What are you doing, Mr. Goodwin?" demanded Ora, who, with both of her young friends, sat amazed at the rapidity of the whole transaction.

"I am 'taking the responsible,' my dear, as Old Hickory would have expressed it. Charley, trot off with you to my wagon, and drive the young ladies home."

"Yes, Marse Tomfilius," replied the old negro, with prompt obedience to the usurper.

"But, Mr. Goodwin——" began Ora.

"But, Miss Orkney," interrupted the usurper, as he started the horse; "in troublous times of nations or of families, it is the strongest pair of hands that seizes the reins of government and the strongest head that directs the course."

"Where are you going? What are you about to do?" demanded Miss Orkney, half rising in her seat.

"My dear girl, this day is the Sabbath, and this place is the church yard. Do not make a scene. Trust in me, and yield the point. I will explain as we go on."

Ora sank back in her seat, without further remonstrance, for she was unwilling to attract the notice of the dispersing congregation, who were now getting into their carriages or mounting their horses to return home.

Mr. Goodwin drove off at a leisurely rate, and let a good many carriages pass him on the road. As for the Welcoming wagon, containing his younger daughters, and driven by Old Charley, that was out of sight far ahead.

Not until they had passed the ferry and had reached

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the "Cross Roads" did any more conversation pass between the "usurper" and the "captive princess."

Here stood a sign post, with cross boards bearing these guides—N. To Lower Umbra. E. To Welcoming. S. To the Caves. W. To Hall-in-Umbra. Here Mr. Goodwin turned the pony's head to the east instead of to the west.

"Where are you going?" quickly demanded Miss Orkney again, half rising in her seat.

"To drive you to Welcoming, my dear girl," gently replied the old squire.

"But, Mr. Goodwin!"

"But, my dear Ora!"

"I said I would not go to Welcoming! And I will not!"

"For all that, I am taking you there!"

"Mr. Goodwin!"

"Come, my dear girl, you must really yield this point! You promised to return with us to Welcoming to dine and spend the afternoon; and you must keep your word."

"But I gave you reasons why I ought not to go and would not go to Welcoming."

"Reasons which I do not recognize as good ones, Ora."

"Well, then, I choose to return home to Hall-in-Umbra! Turn the horse, Mr. Goodwin! Do you hear? I choose to go home."

"But, my dear girl, you cannot always do as you choose! None of us can! You cannot in this instance, because it is necessary that you should go with me and my daughters to-day."

"I think I understand you, Mr. Goodwin! You think it necessary, after the insults I have received to-

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day, that you should indorse me, even at the risk of your own and your daughters' good standing in the neighborhood."

"My dear Ora, do not say such very painful things! Come, now! Come, now; come home quietly with us to-day, and I will promise never to press you to do so again in opposition to your will," pleaded the good squire.

"I understand and appreciate your kindness, and I thank you from my heart," said Ora, in a voice faltering with emotion.

"Nonsense! Nonsense, my dear child! Don't mention it!" said the old gentleman, taking Ora's words for consent, and touching up the pony to a brisker gait.

Bevvie, who was seated beside Ora, stole her hand into that of her friend with a meaning pressure that said much—much more than Ora comprehended at the time.

They soon reached Welcoming farmhouse, where the young girls, having arrived half an hour before, were waiting to receive them.

Hyacinth led Ora and Bevvie into the parlor bedroom on the right hand of the wall, where the two had slept on the first night of their arrival three months previous, and left them there to lay off their bonnets and wraps, while she herself went to look after the dinner table, for she was housekeeper that week.

As soon as the two young women were alone, Bevvie threw herself into the arms of her friend and burst into tears.

"Bevvie! Bevvie! What ails you, my dear?" inquired Ora, dropping into the nearest armchair under the weight of the shock she had received.

"Oh!" cried the girl, sinking at the feet of her friend,

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and dropping her head into Ora's lap, "it is my fault—all my fault—that you, the pure and noble one, should be maligned and insulted, misunderstood and ostracized! I will not stand it for another day, Ora! I will give my secret to the world! I will say it is I whom they should condemn, and not the magnanimous one who has thrown the shield of her love over my fault!"

"Bevvie! Bevvie! how wildly you talk! You are mad—as mad as you were when you threw yourself on the railroad track before the rushing engine! Bevvie, calm yourself, I beg you!" pleaded Ora, running her fingers caressingly through the black ringlets of the head that was bowed upon her lap.

"Yes; I will be calm—if I can. But I will confess my fault. You shall not bear the blame—you shall not, Ora! I swear it before high Heaven!" exclaimed Bevvie, in great excitement.

"Hush, child, hush! You do not know what you are saying! You are under oath not to reveal your secret marriage with Prince Frederick, and you cannot break your oath."

"Bah!' passionately exclaimed Bevvie. "I do not mean to break my oath or reveal my secret marriage! My marriage, indeed! What does my marriage amount to? What does the marriage of any private woman with a prince amount to? What did the marriage of Miss Patterson with Prince Jerome Bonaparte amount to? What did the marriage of Prince George with Mrs. Fitzherbert amount to? Nothing whatever! You know it! I have been a fool, Ora! and you suffer the blame for my folly! But this shall not continue! I must and will clear you! I shall say nothing about my marriage, not only because I promised to keep it secret, but because I have come to consider it a dream, a chi-

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mera, an utter unreality. So I will keep my promise, and the secret of my marriage."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Bevvie," said Ora, bending down and kissing the black-haired head upon her lap. "And now, tell me, darling, what you did mean by saying that you would give your secret to the world?" she quietly inquired.

"I will own my child!" exclaimed Bevvie, lifting her head, and looking into Ora's face with flashing eyes.

Ora, speechless with surprise and consternation, met those blazing orbs in silence.

"I will! I swear I will! I never promised any one to keep the secret of my child's birth; and my child is a fixed fact! And I will tell everybody—everybody—that he is mine—mine! And then I will take him and go away somewhere and try to get my living!"

Ora, gathering her affrighted faculties together as well as she could, took hold of the shoulders of the excited girl, drew her up from the floor, and strained her to her own bosom. Holding her closely there, she whispered hoarsely:

"Bevvie! Bevvie! would you break my heart? Oh! my darling, don't you know that I love you more than a world full of these miserable people who misjudge me? I care nothing for them, Bevvie—nothing. I would not deign to clear myself to them, even if we could do so without broken oaths! We have the Goodwins, and we want no one else! Oh! was it not well to have been misunderstood, maligned and ostracized by all these weak, dull, shallow people for the sake of proving all the love and truth and strength of the Goodwins? Bevvie, my love, promise me that you will not do or say anything imprudent or impulsive while we stay here to-day. Let the beloved family who entertain

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us have peace to-day. Think how it would shock and agitate them if you should make the revelation you threaten. Think of that, Bevvie."

"Oh!" sobbed the impulsive young creature, "I did not mean to say anything to disturb this household to-day! But—I must clear you, dearest dear—I must, indeed! And I can only do it by owning my own child."

"Say no more about it, Bevvie. If possible, think no more about it until we get home this evening; then we will talk it over. There, go bathe your face and eyes, my dear, for we shall be called to dinner soon," said Ora, as she kissed the girl and released her.

They remained in the room, however, until they were called to the table, where they met their cordial host, surrounded by his blooming, flower-named daughters, who made of the dinner a merry feast, despite some unpleasant antecedents of the day.

After dinner the whole company enjoyed a restful afternoon in the old-fashioned parlor.

Dr. Leicester came in to an early tea, blushed like a girl when he shook hands with Bevvie, and then seated himself near the old squire, who forthwith engaged him to come the next day and draw the decayed teeth of some half a dozen old negroes.

"I have got them to consent to the operation by convincing them that bad teeth are the cause of bad health and short life. And my old darkies, who have so little to live for, are very anxious to live long and happy," the squire explained.

Meanwhile Pink whispered aside to Bevvie:

"Papa only does this to give the doctor some practice, and keep his spirits up."

"Why don't you marry him and keep his spirits up yourself?" inquired Bevvie.

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"Because, my dear, he would not have me," candidly replied Pink.

"Why, he is looking this way, toward you, out of the corners of his eyes, all the time," said Bevvie.

"Is he? Well, he may be looking toward me, but he is not looking at me," laughed Pink.

Tea was announced, and they all filed into the dining room, where a delicious repast had been laid out under the skilled auspices of Hyacinth, the housekeeper for the week.

Soon after this early tea, the pony carriage was brought up to the door by Old Charley, and Ora and Bevvie, bidding good-by to their kind friends, the Goodwins, and to Dr. Leicester, took their seats in the chaise and started for home.

A pleasant drive of two hours, mostly through the woods of Umbra, brought them home by "early candlelight."

They found the baby, the innocent cause of all the misunderstanding and trouble, fast asleep.

"Bevvie, dear, shall we postpone our promised talk until to-morrow?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Yes, Ora," replied the girl.

And they retired to rest.

CHAPTER XI

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

THE next morning Miss Orkney had a long and serious talk with her young protégé.

Bevvie had grown much calmer, and was ready to listen to reason.

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Bevvie, therefore, yielded to her benefactress' arguments, and consented to keep the secret of her maternity until she should be at liberty to reveal that of her marriage.

Old Mr. Goodwin drove over that afternoon with his two daughters, Jessamine and Pink.

Ora was obliged to welcome them cordially. So it turned out that Miss Orkney was not permitted to carry into effect her heroic resolution, "never to enter Welcoming and never to receive the Goodwins at Hall-in-Umbra, lest she should compromise the social standing of those dear friends and supporters."

Now what could a young lady do but yield to irresistible circumstances? For instance, she could not have made an unseemly disturbance in the church yard on Sunday morning, by resisting, to the bitter end, her obstinate old neighbor's determination to drive her home with his own daughters; and, therefore, she was compelled, against her resolution, to go to Welcoming.

And on this Monday morning, when the old squire came with two of his flower daughters to visit her, she could not refuse them admittance; and, therefore, was obliged, against her resolution, to receive the Goodwins at Hall-in-Umbra.

The squire entered jovially, with something like a smile of triumph and defiance on his face, and said that they had come to spend the day, and take dinner and tea, and that they would return by starlight.

Bevvie carried the girls to her own room to lay off their bonnets, while Ora took the squire's hat and overcoat, and made him sit down in her father's great armchair before the fine wood fire in the corner fireplace.

Here the girls soon joined them with their knitting

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work, which, like old-fashioned country folk, they had brought with them when coming out to spend the day.

It was while they were seated around the fire in social chat that the door opened and Nelie appeared, making mysterious signs to her mistress.

"What is it? What do you want, Nelie? Speak out."

The woman approached her mistress, and said:

"Oh, ma'am, such a s'prise!"

"What surprise? Anything else gone?"

"No, young mist'ess. Somefin come. Yer 'members Hera?"

"The young nursemaid who used to help you to take care of me when I was a child?"

"Yes, mist'ess, dat same. An' wot run 'way wid de sojers w'en dey was foridgin' 'bout yere."

"Well—what of her?"

"She have come back, mist'ess! Come back yere, like the p'odigal son in de parable."

"Come back! I am very glad to hear that, very! When did she come?"

" 'Pears like Saddy night, mist'ess, she 'rove on de place an' stop long o' Aunt Jenny an' Aunt Judy in der cabin in der woods. An' we dem didn' know nuffin' 'tall 'bout it till dis same Mon'y mornin', w'en she come right up to de house yere, scarin' we dem almos' to deaf wid her sudden 'pearance!"

"Where is she now?"

"In de kitchen, young mist'ess, beggin' for to be 'mitted to see you, an' cryn' an' moanin' powerful 'bout her chile."

"About her child? What child?"

"Her little gal, young mist'ess, wot we dem t'ought as she had tuk 'way long ob her w'en she went off wid

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de sojer men; 'case we nebber see sight ob de chile arter she lef', an' ob course we t'ought she had tuk it wid her."

"How old was the child?"

"'Bout fibe year ole, mo' or less, mist'ess."

"And you have never seen her since her mother left?"

"Nebber laid eyes on a sign ob her, none ob us has."

"And you say her mother did not carry her off?"

"Hi! wot I tell you, mist'ess? Course she didn't! She 'spected to fine her here. Dat's wot fotch Hera back yere partly to look arter her little gal. An' I tell yer wot, she's taken on powerful 'bout it in de kitchen dere, mist'ess."

"I will go and see her at once. Will you please excuse me for a few moments?" inquired Miss Orkney, turning to her visitors, who had been silent and interested witnesses of the interview between mistress and maid.

"Certainly! Certainly!" answered a chorus of voices.

Miss Orkney arose and followed her housekeeper into the hall. Then she turned into the dining room, where a fire had been kindled, dropped into a chair, and said:

"Show the woman into this room. I will see her here."

Nelie went out and soon returned, ushering in a handsome young negro woman, well dressed in crimson serge and plush, but without bonnet or shawl, both of which she had thrown off and left in the hall as a mark of respect before entering the presence of the young lady.

She courtesied and said:

"I s'pose you don't 'member Hera, young mist'ess?"

"I should not have known you by sight. You were only a girl of about twelve years of age when I saw you

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by the thunder of the cannon so near, she ran away into the mountains, and perished there, poor little thing!"

"Oh, I hope not!" said Ora.

The announcement of dinner interrupted the conversation.

After dinner Mr. Goodwin volunteered to take a ride over Miss Orkney's land to see if everything was going on right.

At the end of two hours he returned to the house and entered the oak parlor, where the four young ladies were seated around the fire, working and chatting.

And he told Ora that the plantation wanted a master; that hired overseers seldom did their duty; that this, that, and the other were wrong; and that Miss Orkney must take a husband or study agriculture.

Ora laughed, and thanked Heaven that a third course was open—to sell the land and invest in government bonds.

The early tea was soon served, and, after it was over, Mr. Goodwin's carriage was announced, and he and his daughters took leave of Ora and Bevvie and started for their evening drive through the woods of Umbra to Welcoming.

CHAPTER XII

"NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS"

THE carriage of the Goodwins had scarcely rolled out of sight and hearing, when Ora and Bevvie, wrapped head and shoulders in warm Scotch plaid shawls, and still standing on the front porch where they had seen

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"If you have obtained that gracious blessing, try to keep it. Do not forfeit it by falling back into sin."

"I'll try not to, mist'ess. I did fall from grace w'en I went 'way 'long ob de sojers. Fo' dat temptation, I t'ought I had got true 'ligion ebber since I loss my Aleck."

"Your Aleck? Who was he?"

"My husban', mist'ess. My po' little Meenie's daddy. He was drownded in de Umbry, yere, 'fo' de wo', w'en my po' little gal was a baby in arms. An' de suddenness ob de stroke turn' me so nervous I got 'ligion, or t'ought I got it. An' I nebber took another husban', but live serious wid my little gal, till dat dere awful temptation come on my way, an' I fell from grace."

"My poor Hera, how could you have been so tempted?"

"De debbil, I s'pose, mist'ess! Nuffin' but de debbil!"

"And you left your child here, you say?"

"Ah, me! Yes, mist'ess, I did. Sinner dat I was, I lef' her! But I didn' mean to 'sert her. 'Deed I didn', mist'ess. I did wan' to take her 'long o' me. But dey 'suaded me to leabe her yere, w'ere she'd be better took care ob, dey said—w'ich I t'ought dat was so, anyways, 'case she had so many 'lations yere; an' I t'ought w'en I got settled in de fine house wot dey promise' me, I'd come an' fetch my little gal home."

"But you never came till now?"

"No, mist'ess, 'case I nebber got my fine house, nor likewise decent home, to fetch my little gal to. But, mist'ess, dat ain't fit fo' you to hear."

"What, at last, induced you to come back?"

"Young mist'ess, 'bout a mont' ago I drapped into de meetin' house—fuss time I had been to church since I

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run away f'om de farm. An' I heerd a sermon preach' wot mos' broke my heart wid shame an' sorrow fo' my sinful life! An' I desolved to come back to de ole home an' lead a new life, an' nebber leabe it no mo', if I had to get my libbin' by working in de fiel'. An' den dere was my little gal as I had been a-pinin' to see all dis time, dough I t'ought she was in good han's w'ere I lef' her."

"But, unfortunately, she was not left here, it seems."

"No, mist'ess. Ah me! No; she was n' seen yere arter I was gone, an' ebberybody t'ought I had took her 'way!"

"Have you any suspicion of what might have become of her?"

"No, mist'ess; none in de worl', 'less some ob dem dere sojers might a-took her 'way, 'dout my knowledge—dough wot dey could want wid a little gal fibe years ole I dunno, 'less it wur to put her in a circus or somefin'. Sometimes I's sorry, 'long as I did go 'way, I didn' take my little gal 'long o' me; but w'en I fink how I was 'ceived myse'f, an' how mebbe, when she got bigger, she might a-come to harm, I's reconcile' as I didn' take her 'way. An' dere was anoder reason w'y I didn' take her 'long o' me, w'ich I nebber tole yer, young mist'ess."

"What was that, Hera?'

"W'y, yer see, mist'ess, she was so awful 'fraid o' de firin'. W'en de battle o' Black Rock was fought, we dem heard de cannon 'way ober here, an' dat chile wor so scared at de boomin' dat she allers run under de bed, or summurs; an' I know'd w'ere I war goin' she'd like to hear more cannon an' mebbe scared to deaf! Oh, young mist'ess, do you fink I s'all ebber be able to fin' my po' little gal?"

"Why, yes; I hope so. She may have wandered away

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to some distant farm, and as no one knew she was lost, and we made no inquiries after her, naturally we have not heard of her; but now diligent search may discover her."

"Thanky, mist'ess; you does gimmy hope, indeed!"

"And now, Hera, I think that for the present you had better make your home with Aunt Jenny and Aunt Judy, where you stayed last night. In the course of a few days I will find work for you. In the meantime I shall send a basket of provisions to that hut in the wood, so that you need not be a burden on the two old women."

"Thanky', young mist'ess! Thanky' a hund'ed t'ousan' times!"

"And now I will let you go, because the servants are waiting to come in and set the dinner table."

"Yes, mist'ess. My dooty to yo', young mist'ess! Good-by, ma'am," said the woman, rising, courtesying, and leaving the dining room.

Miss Orkney returned to the oak parlor, where her visitors were awaiting her, to whom she gave an account of her interview with the returning penitent.

"What a text her story would have been for a sermon from my old friend, your uncle Elijah Mossop, were he still among us, Ora!" remarked Mr. Goodwin.

"Yes; it would. But I am thinking whatever could have become of that child!"

"Ah! there's the mystery!"

"I told the poor mother that the little girl might have wandered off and got lost and picked up by some wagoner or other person and carried off to some distant farm, where, not being able to give an account of herself, she has been kept or put in the almshouse."

"It is possible; but it is more probable that, frightened

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last, and I not much more than five," replied Miss Orkney.

"An' now you's a young lady full growed, an' I's gettin' to be a ole 'oman," sadly answered Hera.

"Oh! no; you are not near being old yet, Hera."

"Yes I is, miss. I's twenty-nine. Nex' birfday be thirty. Thirty is ole, honey! Ole for a 'oman, anyhow. An' I is a ole, heartbroke 'oman! An' it's my own fau't for gwine 'way f'om de ole home 'long o' dem riffraff——"

Here the woman put her hands up to her face and began to cry.

"Sit down, Hera; there is a chair; you are not able to stand. I was sorry to hear that you went away, but now I am glad to see you back again. There, now, sit down and compose yourself," said Miss Orkney kindly, as she pushed with her foot a little rocking chair toward her returned penitent.

"Oh, young mist'ess! You's so good! You's de same feelin'-hearted young lady as you was a feelin'-hearted chile," said Hera, as she waived the proffered honor of the little rocking chair, as being unworthy to occupy it, and took an humbler seat on a low hassock, at some distance from Miss Orkney.

"Yer fergibs me, young mist'ess, don't yer?" sobbed Hera, almost inarticulately.

"It is not I whom you have offended, Hera. You have sinned against your Father in Heaven. It is of Him you must ask forgiveness," said Miss Orkney gravely.

"I done sought arter dat long 'go, young mist'ess, an' I t'inks I has 'tained it. 'Deed I does, ma'am," solemnly responded the woman.

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their visitors off, and lingering now to watch for a few moments the splendor of the autumn starlight, heard the sound of approaching wheels.

"Can they have forgotten anything and be coming back for it?" inquired Bevvie, referring, of course, to the Goodwins.

"No. This is not their carriage. This is a much heavier vehicle! Listen! how slowly it labors along, as if it were overloaded, or come from a long distance," replied Ora.

"What is it, then, do you suppose? Some farm wagon or miller's cart, coming this way?"

"I don't know, Bevvie! We shall see in a moment, for it is certainly approaching the house."

In fact, they could not see much, then; for, though the starlight was brilliant, the trees were thick and still in full foliage, autumn-tinted.

At length the heavy, lumbering carriage rolled and rumbled into sight, and reeled up to the front piazza and stopped.

Ora sprang to her feet with an exclamation of surprise.

She had recognized the old Owlwood "carryall," with Peter on the coachman's seat.

As she went down the steps to meet the visitors, whom she rightly suspected to be her aunts from the old farm, a gentleman stepped from the carriage, lifted his hat in his left hand as he held out his right, and said:

"How do you do, Ora?"

"Oh, Conrad! I am so glad, so overjoyed to see you!" impulsively exclaimed the girl, warmly grasping his hand.

"I am very glad to be here, my cousin," cordially responded the young man.

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Then he instantly turned to assist two old ladies to alight from the carryall.

First came Mrs. Mossop in her rusty black satin bonnet, black silk gown, and black stella shawl.

Ora darted forward to welcome this aged relative.

"Well, Ory, you see—see—see—I have come to—to—to— Hall-in-Umbry. I never meant to co—co—come; but duty called, and I obeyed," said the old lady.

"I am rejoiced to see you, dearest Aunt Mossop," exclaimed the young lady, clasping as much of the globular figure as she could compass with her arms and kissing the round, rosy face.

"There—there—there, child! Let me go—go—go into the house. It is cold here. And there's Coun—Coun—Countie," replied the old lady, bustling up the steps, where Bevvie welcomed her and showed her into the warm oak parlor.

"Dear Aunt Countie! How do you do? I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Ora, meeting the maiden lady with a warm embrace.

"Thank you, Oresta. This, however, is, under the circumstances, a visit more of duty than of pleasure," said Miss Constantia Orkney, rather ungraciously.

"Never mind, Aunt Countie, we will try to make it turn out a visit of pleasure, also," said Ora, as she attended the old lady into the house and led her into the oak parlor, where Mrs. Mossop was already seated before the glowing wood fire.

"Rest here, Aunt Countie, and lay off your bonnet and shawl when you feel disposed. Bevvie will take them upstairs. Here is Bevvie. You have not spoken to her."

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Boone? I hope you are quite well?" said Miss Constantia stiffly.

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"Quite, thank you, Miss Orkney. And yourself? But I scarcely need to ask. You look so well," said Bevvie politely.

"I am well. I never was ill in all my life!" snapped the elder Miss Orkney. Then, turning to her niece, she added:

"Yes, Oresta; duty and not pleasure has brought my sister and myself to this house. Our nephew, Mr. Conrad Orkney, has some important business to settle with you, connected with our deceased brother, Mr. Pendleton Orkney's last will and testament. That is what has brought him here."

"Yes, Aunt Countie; so I supposed," replied Ora courteously.

"And, as the money business might keep him here for a day or two—though I don't see why it should—but he says it might—and, as we did not think it was proper that a young gentleman should visit a young lady who is living as you are, without the protection of parent or guardian, or elderly friend or relation, we—that is, my sister and myself—consented to come with him and stay here as long as he does," concluded Miss Countie.

"Yes; stay—stay—stay as long as he does," chimed in Mrs. Mossop.

"I thank you very much for your kindness in coming to me, my dear aunts," said Ora politely.

At this moment, Mr. Conrad Orkney, who had lingered outside to give some particular directions to the coachman concerning the treatment of the fatigued horses, entered the parlor.

Ora smiled on him and silently offered a chair, which he took.

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"Now, will you lay off your bonnets here, or will you go upstairs to a bedroom?" inquired Ora of her aunts.

"Up—up—upstairs? Why, child, ain't you got no—no—no parlor chamber downstairs, on this floor?" inquired the widow.

"No, Aunt Mossop; I am very sorry to say that I have not," replied Ora.

"To—to—to think of a country house without a parlor chamber down—down—downstairs!"

"I am very sorry, Aunt Mossop; but if I had known you were coming, I should have had this parlor turned into a bedroom for you! But, pray, take your bonnet and shawl off here, and do not fatigue yourself by going upstairs until after supper," said Ora, who at the same time made a sign to Bevvie to go out and order a second supper to be got for these unexpected guests—for Ora did not dare to leave the room to give any orders in person, lest these touchy relatives of hers should choose to consider her absence as a slight to them.

Mrs. Mossop, without rising from her chair, took off her shawl and bonnet, and handed them to Ora.

Miss Orkney senior followed her sister's example.

Ora put all these outer garments over a large chair in the corner, and then signaled Bevvie, who had returned to the parlor, to send in Charley with cake and wine.

At last, when these refreshments came and the old ladies were comfortably sipping and nibbling, Ora had an opportunity of saying to her cousin:

"I feel very happy, Conrad, in congratulating you on your inheritance."

"My inheritance, Ora, that disinherits you?" gravely inquired the young man.

"Yes! yes! yes! for both those reasons I am happy—

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so happy! in congratulating you. I am glad that I have lost the inheritance, and glad that you have got it."

He looked at her in grave surprise and questioning, as not readily catching her meaning.

They were standing together at the front window. Bevvie was out of the room, attending to household duties. The old ladies were hovering over the fire, sipping thir wine, toasting their knees, not noticing the lovers.

Ora continued, in her frank, vehement, impetuous way:

"Yes, Conrad! And I will tell you why. I did not need that inheritance. I had already enough in my modest patrimony. And I knew when that accession of fortune came to me, it raised a barrier between us which your pride would render impassable, indestructible! I knew that the first misunderstanding between us must pass away with time, but I knew that this great fortune which had come to me must separate us forever. Therefore I was glad when I heard that I had lost the inheritance. I am glad, so glad now, to know it is true! And I am glad you have got it, because you are the only male heir, and it is your right—you know it—and it removes every impediment from your path. You need not now wait for professional success before——"

Ora suddenly stopped, and blushed intensely. Her impetuosity had hurried her beyond bounds.

Conrad Orkney, taking her hand, finished her sentence for her.

"Settling myself; or, asking you to crown our long love by becoming my wife. Dearest dear! There is, indeed, but one impediment to our happiness, and it is a matter of far more serious importance to our future

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lives than any question of fortune, on the one side or the other, could possibly become——"

He paused, and she looked up at him questioningly.

"Dearest dear!" he continued, fixing his dark, grave eyes upon her troubled face. "This is an impediment that only you can remove, and you know it."

She gazed at him deprecatingly, appealingly.

"Tell me," he proceeded; "tell me the meaning of your sudden journey last spring; of your long absence from home, and of your present strange surroundings—all of which have exposed you to the grossest and most humiliating misconstruction, and alienated all your friends and relatives."

Again he paused for a reply, looking down on her with grave, dark eyes.

"Conrad!" said Ora, in a low, choking voice; "Conrad, can you believe evil of me?"

"No! on my word and honor! No! on my soul, I cannot!" he earnestly exclaimed. "But," he added, in a graver and deeper tone, "I have a right to your fullest confidence, Ora, and until——"

"Please, ladies, supper is on de table," announced Old Charley, opening the parlor door with a wide swing.

"And I ne—ne—never was more ready for supper in all my life!" exclaimed old Mrs. Mossop, rising from her armchair.

"We will talk of this further to-morrow morning, dear Ora, when I have also other matters to discuss with you," said Conrad Orkney, as he gave the young hostess his arm to lead her to the dining room.

The whole family party assembled around the bountiful supper table, where the old ladies proved that family misunderstandings had not affected their appe-

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tites and that they had lost none of their keen appreciation of the good things of this life.

Old Charley, who waited on the table, was kept constantly running back and forth between the kitchen and dining room with relays of hot rice waffles and broiled birds, until, as he afterward declared, he got cramps in both feet from turning around so often. And Aunt Nelie, the cook, complained that her head was so hot with bending over the blazing fire of burning coals with waffle irons and gridiron, that she thought Satan had got her before her time.

When the old ladies had satisfied their mighty hunger, they still lingered around the table, sipping tea, and slowly beginning:

"We met o—o—old Mr. Tophe Goodwin, about half a mile from the house. He ha—ha—had Jess and Pink along of him. He sa—sa—said they'd been spending the day here," remarked old Mrs. Mossop.

"Yes, I thought you must have met them," replied Ora.

"Do they come often? The young ladies, I mean," inquired Miss Constantia.

"Quite often," answered Ora.

"Ah! I am glad to hear it! I scarcely thought you had any lady friends left, Oresta," said Miss Constantia.

"I have, and care to have, only them, Aunt Countie," calmly repled the young lady.

"Which—which—which of the gals is young Dr. Leicester gwine to marry?" inquired Mrs. Mossop.

"Neither, so far as I know, Aunt Marcie."

"Well! an—an—anyway, people say he's always there!"

"He is a friend of the family, you know!"

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The old hall clock, that had been recently repaired, began to strike loudly.

Miss Orkney senior counted the strokes, and when they ceased she hastily arose and exclaimed:

"Nine o'clock! Marcie, it is time all steady people were in bed."

All the company left the table.

Ora marshaled her two aged relatives up to the long bed chamber, "the haunted room," that had been prepared for them under the direction of Bevvie.

Old Charley, wax candles in hand, conducted Mr. Conrad Orkney to the back chamber, over the dining room, and in the rear of Bevvie's apartment—the same room in which Ora and Hyacinth had slept on the night of the strange disappearance of the watch.

As Conrad Orkney, attended by Old Charley, reached the landing at the head of the stairs, he met Ora, face to face, again. She had just seen her aunts in bed, and had left the long room.

"I feared that I should not have an opportunity of bidding you good-night, my fair cousin," said the young man.

"I was coming down," replied the young lady. "However," she added, "we can say good-night here."

"And to-morrow we must have an interview and a final understanding."

"Yes."

They exchanged good-night, and Conrad Orkney followed Charley and the wax candle to his apartment, while Ora turned and entered Bevvie's chamber, where she was—not to sleep, but to lie awake through the whole night, anxiously thinking of the impending interview.

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CHAPTER XIII

CONRAD AND ORA

A little longer
To do or bear,
A little space yet
For faith and prayer;
Then the home and rest,
And the robes of white,
Where faith is changed
To the joy of sight.—J. L. H.

Ora had set her alarm clock to half-past six; for she knew her two old aunts would be up with the earliest dawn of day, and would expect their breakfast at seven o'clock sharp—Owlwood Farmhouse hours.

So, at the appointed time, the alarm sounded through the quiet bedroom, awakening Ora, arousing Bevvie, and frightening the baby almost into fits.

"Oh, never set that horrid thing again, Ora!" exclaimed Bevvie, as she jumped out of the bed, with her fingers in her ears, and only took them out to snatch up the screaming child and comfort him.

"No; I never will! I will risk oversleeping myself and offending my aunties first!" said Ora, as she arose and began to make her toilet.

The nurse came in and took the baby out to dress him; and the two young women prepared for breakfast.

"I am anxious to find out how the aunties passed the night in the haunted room," said Bevvie.

"We shall soon know, for I hear them stirring," replied Ora.

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And then both girls went down to the oak parlor to be ready to receive the old ladies when they should make their appearance.

In a few moments Mrs. Mossop and Miss Countie entered together.

A quick glance from the young women showed both the guests looking quite serene.

"Good morning, Aunt Mossop and Aunt Countie. I hope you both rested well," said Ora, rising to give them seats near the fire.

"Very well, thank you, Oresta," replied Miss Orkney senior, in her stately way, as she took her seat.

"Ne—ne—never slept better in all my life! Never! Didn't even tur—tur—turn over once," said Mrs. Mossop, as she dropped her round little person into an armchair.

A moment later Conrad Orkney came in and offered his morning greetings to the circle of relatives.

"What time do you breakfast here, Ora?" rather anxiously inquired Mrs. Mossop, with her hands folded fondly over her stomach, as she glanced at the old-fashioned corner clock, whose hands were on the stroke of seven.

"Now, if you like, Aunt Mossop," replied Ora, as she touched the bell.

Old Charley obeyed the call.

"Bring in the coffee," said the young lady, and, rising, she invited her guests to follow her, and led the way to the dining room.

It would have delighted some people and displeased others to have seen the way in which fat little Mrs. Mossop enjoyed her meals, and how busily she kept the servants running to and from the kitchen, fetching in relays of hot buckwheat cakes and venison steaks.

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When breakfast was, at length, over, and all the company had left the dining room, Conrad Orkney spoke to Ora and said:

"Now, my dear cousin, will you give me a half hour's interview?"

"Certainly," said Ora, and then, turning to her guests, she inquired courteously:

"Will you excuse me and let Bevvie take my place with you, for a little while?"

"Of course we will excuse you, Oresta! We know that Conrad must have a settlement and understanding with you. That is what brought us here," said Miss Countie.

"Ye—ye—yes! That's what brou—brou—brought us here," added Mrs. Mossop.

And then the two guests, attended by Bevvie, filed off to the left to return to the oak parlor, while Ora led off to the right, followed by Conrad, into the long drawing room.

The cousins seated themselves at a table near the front windows.

"First," said Conrad, "we will get this little legacy business out of the way."

"Time enough for that," replied Ora.

"Yes, my dear cousin; but the time is now," said Conrad, drawing a pocket writing case from the inside of his coat, opening it, and taking from it a check on a San Francisco bank for twenty-five thousand dollars, and a printed form of receipt for the same, which he requested her to sign.

She went to a little Japanese writing desk that stood in a corner of the room, affixed her signature, and then brought the receipt back and gave it to her cousin Conrad.

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"Now that is settled," he said as he handed her the check.

She took it, mechanically folded it, and put it into her portemonnaie.

"And now, my dear Ora, let me implore you to give me your confidence and to reveal to me the secret reason for your strange course of conduct during the last six or eight months," said Mr. Orkney, with affectionate earnestness.

"Conrad!" murmured Ora in a broken voice, "do you suspect me of evil?"

"No!" he replied energetically; "I have said so before."

"Then of what do you complain?"

"My dearest dear, I complain of nothing!"

"Then what is it that you want me to explain?"

"I have told you, love! Your strange course of conduct for the last half year or more. Your strange surroundings at present."

"What part of my conduct? What part of my surroundings?" pleaded Ora. "Be more specific, Conrad."

"Shall I go over the whole ground of the offense?—offense not to me! but to the public opinion! Shall I go over this ground, dear Ora?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Then, Ora, last March you suddenly announced your intention to your friends at Owlwood of taking a long journey, with no other companion than a half-grown girl, the child of your adoption——"

"I think that Bevvie might have been considered a woman! She was nearly seventeen years old," replied Ora, with an odd smle.

"A child, a mere child at that age! No sort of protection to you, who, though five years her senior, were

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still but a young girl, needing a chaperone in the form of some discreet elderly lady, to fulfil proprieties."

"Do you think that I was not able to take care of myself and of my protégé also?"

"It is not what I think, dearest Ora; it is what the world thinks of such a course."

"But do you think I could not and did not take care of myself?"

"No! I have said so before! I believe no evil and no weakness of you! I believe you would and did take care of yourself! But, as I said, it is not what I think, but what the community thinks, that most affects you."

"And the community thinks that I ought to have traveled with a chaperone instead of with a protégé?"

"Yes—and given some account of your travels!"

"Is there anything else the community complains of?"

"They criticize your present surroundings."

"What part of my present surroundings?"

"Ora, dearest, the subject is an extremely delicate one."

"Whom or what do they object to?" demanded the young lady.

"I say, my dear Ora, that this part of the subject can be but very slightly touched between you and myself. You understand."

"Yes; I understand," said the young lady, slowly bending her head; "I understand all! You wish me, in the first place, to explain to you why I went away, in the manner I did, and against the remonstrance of all my relatives and friends?"

Conrad bowed gravely in assent.

"And you wish me to tell you where I went, where I stayed, whom I saw, and what I did, while absent?"

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Again Conrad Orkney bowed silent assent.

"And you wish me to tell you the story of my latest adoption, and all the circumstances under which this adoption was made?"

"Yes, Ora; I wish to hear all that! Not for my own satisfaction, for, as I told you, I think no evil! I do not share in the cruel suspicions of the neighborhood; but I wish you to put me into possession of all the facts, that I may be able to defend you against your enemies, and vindicate you to your friends."

"Conrad! I care nothing, not the weight of a single sigh, for what my 'enemies' think or say of me. I never willingly or justly made an enemy in my life. And as to my 'friends,' if they need that I should be vindicated to them, they are friends only in name, for whom I care even less, if possible, than for my foes! So, my dear cousin, since you do not need this explanation for your own satisfaction, but for theirs, I have the less reluctance in telling you plainly that I will not give it," said the young lady, speaking with quiet dignity.

"I must submit to your decision, Miss Orkney!" replied the gentleman, in a voice so cold and stern that Ora felt that all was over between them, as he arose to leave the room.

"Stop!"

It was another voice that spoke, in a peremptory and even an authoritative tone of command.

Conrad and Ora started simultaneously, looked up, and saw Bevvie standing in the doorway, with a look so strange, fierce, and resolute that her dark eyes seemed to burn in a face of marble.

"Go back! go back, Bevvie!" exclaimed Ora, with a fearful foreshadowing of what was coming.

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"I will not go back!" replied the girl, advancing toward them. "And I have not been eavesdropping—though appearances are against me. No, Mr. Orkney! don't leave the room! I have something to say which concerns you as much as anybody. I was sent here on an errand by Mrs. Mossop. Never mind that—it can wait!"

"Bevvie! Bevvie! my darling, remember yourself!" exclaimed Miss Orkney.

"Ora, I have remembered myself too much, and you too little. I told you I would tell my secret; and I will! Yes! I will give it to the winds rather than have you suffer any more wrong for my good-for-nothing sake!" cried the excited girl.

"Conrad, leave the room! Dear Conrad, please to go and leave her to me! She is hysterical! She is not responsible! She ought not to be seen now except by me!" pleaded Ora, so anxiously that Mr. Orkney again turned to go.

"Stay where you are!" commanded Bevvie. "I charge you, in justice to your cousin there, to stay where you are and listen to what I have to say, for it relates to her and embodies the explanation you wish to hear."

Conrad Orkney resumed his seat.

Ora sank into an armchair.

Bevvie, standing before them, continued:

"As I opened the door, I heard some part of your conversation, Mr. Orkney—not much. Only a few words; but enough to convince me that my angel there, my Ora, was about to complete her martyrdom by a crowning sacrifice, the sacrifice of her lover, her betrothed! and all for the sake of a weak and faulty creature like myself!"

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"Bevvie! Bevvie! How dare you! Be silent, I command you!" exclaimed Ora.

"Let her speak!" said Conrad Orkney sternly.

"All the saints in heaven should not keep me from speaking now!" triumphantly declared Bevvie.

"You will ruin yourself!" cried Ora.

"Why should I think of my 'self'?" demanded Bevvie.

"Go on!" said Conrad Orkney.

"Very well! I intend to go on! All Ora's 'friends' and 'enemies' demand to know why she left home, with only me for a companion, do they not?"

"Yes," said Conrad Orkney through his set teeth.

"Then I will tell you. Ora went on my account. I was in a false position through my own credulity and folly, but through no fault deeper than those. And I was in such despair that in a moment of frenzy I attempted to take my own life."

"Great Heaven, girl!" exclaimed Conrad Orkney.

"Yes; in a moment of frenzy I threw myself across the railroad track before the rushing express train. And she—my angel, my Ora, who had never lost sight of me, but, unseen of me, was always secretly watching over me—she, at the imminent risk of her own precious life, snatched me from the very jaws of death! Why, I felt the burning heat of the rushing engine, and in the same second of time that she snatched me off and fell with me clear of the track, the train thundered over it."

"Heaven and earth, girl! You should have been clapped into a madhouse for the rest of your life!" exclaimed Conrad Orkney, with a shudder.

"Yes; I know I should; not for the attempt at self-destruction, but for risking (though unconsciously) so sacred a life as that of my Ora, my angel!" said Bev-

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vie, so meekly as to disarm the indignation of Mr. Orkney.

"Proceed," he said, in a milder tone.

"When my guardian angel had so rescued me, at the extreme peril of her own precious life, I could but submit myself to her—utterly. She took me home—to Owlwood—and that night won from me the story of my folly and despair. And——"

"Take care, Bevvie! Take care! Do not break your pledged word!' exclaimed Ora.

"I shall take care! Well, having heard my secret, she, my Ora, my angel, promised to keep it; and not only to keep it, but to take me far, far away among strangers, so that no one here should ever discover or even suspect it. She announced her journey to your aunts, but gave no satisfactory reason for such an extraordinary step; for, you see, she could not give the true reason without exposing me, and she would not give a false one. So she took me away from Owlwood, and placed herself 'under the ban.' That, Mr. Orkney, is the true explanation of Ora's long journey and protracted absence. She went away, and stayed away, to protect and defend me from the consequences of my own folly."

Conrad Orkney nodded slowly and gravely in reply. Then he went over to his cousin, bowed lowly before her, lifted her hand reverently to his lips, and returned to his seat, in perfect silence.

Bevvie resumed:

"When we returned from that long journey and protracted absence—which was undertaken and endured only on my account—no one thought of me. I was a child, too insignificant for any consideration. All the censure, all the suspicion, all the ignominy, fell upon

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her, my Ora, my angel—upon her, so good, so noble, so generous. Her own relations refused to receive her back at Owlwood, and their rejection sounded the tocsin for all the malignant scandal mongers of the county, so that when we came here, to Ora's own home, she was rejected by her old neighbors as she had been rejected by her own relatives. There was but one exception to this craven rule. The fine, high-spirited, Goodwins have been faithful to Ora."

"I shall honor them the more so long as I live," said Conrad Orkney earnestly.

"And now," said Bevvie, with a touch of angry sarcasm in her tone, "having received the required explanation of Ora's distant travel and lengthened absence, you also wish to solve the mystery of her present—'surroundings.' I think that was the word. You wish to understand her present surroundings?"

"No," replied Conrad Orkney, slowly and gravely—"no; having received the key, I can unlock the mystery. You need tell me nothing more."

"Very well, then. I am glad some glimmer has penetrated your mind; it may, in time, reach even the more densely obtuse and deeply darkened minds of our friends and neighbors. And now, Mr. Conrad Orkney, to your knees for having wronged the purest. gentlest, loveliest lady that ever pledged her love at ardent lover's prayer," said Bevvie, as she turned and left the room.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE OPENED GULF

"Ora! my only love!" said Conrad Orkney, seating himself beside her and taking her hand, and seeking her eyes.

She left her finger in his clasp, and met his glance with kindness.

"You have forgiven me even before I have asked you. You have forgiven me for my unjust anger at your reticence that I could not understand. For that, dearest dear, was the whole sum of my offense to you. If I had wronged you by one single, one passing instant's unworthy suspicion of you, I should not dare to ask your pardon for such an unpardonable insult! You know it!"

"Yes, I know it," answered Ora gently. And even then, as ever, more solicitous for her "child's" honor than for her own, she hastened to add: "And to regard Bevvie with any 'unworthy suspicion' would be as great a wrong to her as the same thing would be to me. She has erred in judgment only. She is a pure, good woman."

"She was married, then?" said Conrad.

"I must not answer that question. I am not free to speak on that subject at present. But I tell you, Conrad, that Bevvie's honor is unsullied. She is worthy of any lady's or of any gentleman's respect and friendship. I believed this before I took her to Canada, and there I had my faith confirmed by facts. I tell you this, and I ask you to take my word for its truth," said Ora, with great earnestness.

"I do! I do, dearest dear! I could not do other-

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wise. Truth is set upon your brow. And now, my sweet and saintly cousin, you must give me a husband's right to defend your honor against all calumniators."

Ora looked at her lover through tearful eyes, but made no reply.

"There is no need for delay. Your nearest relatives are all present in the house. Fix, then, an early, very early day for our marriage. Let it be this week."

"No, Conrad."

"Why not?"

"It cannot be."

"Next week, then! The first day, Monday. And then I will take you off to Richmond, away from all these voices."

"No, Conrad, no! Not this week, nor next week, nor ever, until this cloud is lifted from my life. I would not wrong you so, dearest one. I feel your devotion. I am deeply grateful for it, but I would not wrong you so deeply as to accept it and become your wife," gravely and sweetly replied Ora.

"What is the meaning of all this? Ora, you seriously distress me."

"I am sorry, dear. But listen to me! You have a career of honor and distinction before you. You are ambitious. You must not injure your prospects at the very outset by marrying a woman who is talked about."

"Good Heaven, Ora! Do you really mean to succumb to this storm of calumny and let it beat you to the earth?" indignantly demanded Conrad.

"No; far from it! It shall not bend my head a hair's breadth! I have but one feeling—pity for my calumniators. But—my head would be indeed bowed—bowed in deepest humiliation, if the name of any one dear to me were involved with me! No, Conrad! Dear

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Conrad, I cannot and will not become your wife until my name is cleared from every shade of calumny! It may be so cleared in a week, or in a month, or a year or never! I cannot tell! But—we must wait for that."

"Ora! I cannot and will not wait for any such contingency! I will not press this subject now! But I will not leave this neighborhood until I take you with me as my wife."

"But your business, Conrad?"

"Must wait upon your pleasure, your decision!"

"I have already given it!"

"But I will not take that as a finality! You must give me another sort of decision before I leave this neighborhood. And, in the meantime, my business must wait!"

"Conrad, you are very unkind and obstinate!"

"I confess that I am obstinate, and very obstinate upon this point!" said the young gentleman firmly and grimly.

"And I can be as obstinate as yourself—in a matter of conscience and principle."

"Ora, I shall set the case before our relatives, Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia Orkney!"

"Conrad!" exclaimed the young lady, in sudden terror. "Conrad! you have discovered a secret, through the reckless generosity of poor Bevvie! That secret should be as sacredly kept by you as if you had been bound by oath to keep it before being intrusted with it! Conrad! you will keep poor Bevvie's secret?"

"And leave you to suffer the consequences of her folly?" indignantly demanded the young gentleman.

"Yes! since your honor requires it of us!" energetically replied Ora.

"Very well! I will be silent! But I will be silent

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only because I am sure that Bevvie will not be so! Nor should I respect her if she were."

"Oh, if she could tell her whole secret—then all would be well! But she cannot tell her whole secret! She can only tell enough of it to expose her to misconstruction—to ruin her!" moaned Ora.

"You really seem to have that girl's interest more at heart than your own reputation or my happiness!" said Conrad sorrowfully.

"Reputation and happiness are good things; but they are not the best and highest things! Truth and honor are better even than they!"

"Your sentiments and opinions are too exalted for practical life, Ora!"

"I do not think so! And I wish for no life in which they—truth and honor—are not the chief considerations—the governing principles! But, dear Conrad, I must go and look after my wayward, impulsive child, to prevent her from committing some reckless, generous indiscretion. You have nothing more to say to me, Conrad, dear?"

"Nothing at this moment, love! Hereafter, much!"

"Then, pray excuse me. I must look after Bevvie," said Ora, as she left the room.

In the hall she heard the sound of voices from the oak parlor beyond. She opened a door and went in.

She found her two aunts, usually good, quiet old women enough, in a highly excited state of mind.

To say that they both pounced upon their niece like a couple of terriers upon a mouse would be a rough but not exaggerated comparison.

"So, Oresta Orkney, what is this that we hear?" exclaimed Miss Constantia, whose face was flushed with excitement.

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"Ye-ye-ye-ye-yes! What?" stammered Mrs. Mossop, worse than ever, for the more she was moved, the worse she stammered.

"You have a most improper girl in this house—your father's honored house, where no shadow of a shame ever came!" went on Miss Constantia, without waiting for reply.

"Ev-ev-ev-ev—— Oh!" stammered and blowed Mrs. Mossop.

"Your conduct is quite unpardonable, Oresta Orkney! Altogether quite unpardonable!"

"Un-par-par-par-par-par—— Oh!"

"It was bad enough! quite bad enough for you to go off as you did, and give no account of yourself for months; and then to come home bringing an adopted infant—that was as bad as could be, we thought! We thought no worse than that! But, now!"

"Ye-ye-ye-ye-yes! Now! Oh!"

"Well, now, what heinous crime have I committed?" inquired Ora, seating herself at the corner of the table under the front window, and relieving her own excitement by tapping nervously upon the top with her fingers.

"You ask what crime? You know very well! You know why you went away and took Bevvie Boone with you! You know what happened while you were away! You know what you brought back with you, calling it an adopted child! And now we know as well as you do! For the lost and ruined creature has confessed to us that she is the mother of that child!" vehemently replied Miss Constantia, crimsoning with anger.

"Mo-mo-mo-mo-mother! Oh!" gasped Mrs. Mossop.

"Sister, pray keep still or go away. You are fit or nothing in this matter!" said Miss Constantia.

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"Fit-fit-fit-fit-fitz!" whimpered the old lady. "Oh, if po' 'Li-'Li-'Lijah was 'live!" And then she subsided into her armchair, and gave no further sign of life except by low sighing and sniveling.

"And, in consequence of all this, and acting in the capacity of your oldest relative and nearest friend, I ordered that sinful young woman to pack up her clothes, take her child, and leave the house, which they have both dishonored!"

"You did!" exclaimed Ora Orkney, starting to her feet, scarlet with indignation.

"Yes; of course I did! It was the only thing to do!"

"You ordered Bevvie and her child out of this house?"

"Yes; I tell you I did!"

"You are my father's sister, though showing yourself most unworthy of the relationship. So, I will forbear to do that which I am so strongly tempted to do now, and which seems to be so perfectly in order—were you not my father's sister!" said Oresta, trying to control her fury, which only broke out in a half hysterical laugh.

"I suppose you mean that you are tempted to order me out of the house! That would seem to be the proper thing to you."

"I did not say so. But I say this, Miss Constantia Orkney: That you have taken a most unwarrantable and unpardonable liberty! I shall waive my right to apology from you, but I shall have to request you to apologize to Bevvie for the unprecedented insults you have offered her under my roof!" said Ora.

"Upon—my—word!" breathed Miss Constantia, aghast at this view of the case.

"W-o-r-d!" sighed Mrs. Mossop, in a low response, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

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"I hope you will be willing to do this when I have set you right in regard to my young friend. Bevvie is a pure and honorable young lady. She has a lawful and Christian right to her child—as good a right to her child as my mother had to me, or your mother to you."

"Hear her blasphemies! To dare to compare that creature to her own mother and to mine!" cried Miss Constantia.

"Oo-oo-m!" moaned Mrs. Mossop.

"It is in no disparagement to those honored ladies. I repeat it, that Bevvie is altogether worthy of the respect and friendship of the purest woman or the most honorable man in this world," insisted Ora.

"Yet, here in this house is a living pledge of her dishonor!" snarled Miss Constantia.

"I have already assured you that this is not so—that Bevvie has a lawful and godly right to her child."

"Then, perhaps madam is married? Though she did not tell us so in her confession," sneered Miss Constantia.

Ora made no reply.

"If she is married, where is her husband?"

Ora remained silent.

"And who is her husband? What is his name? Where did he meet her? When were they married? Why doesn't he come forward to claim his wife and child? That is what I want to know!" demanded Miss Constantia.

"Oo-oome!" moaned Mrs. Mossop.

"You do not answer me, Oresta Orkney! You cannot!" said Miss Constantia.

"You must take my simple word for it, that Bevvie is perfectly worthy of all respect from all persons. You must take that without further explanation. And you

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must apologize to her for your unpardonable rudeness and insults," firmly insisted Ora.

"Gra—cious heav—ens!" panted Miss Constantia.

"Where is Bevvie? I came here to look for her!"

"She has gone to pack up, I suppose! She, at least, with all her wickedness, has some sense of decency left, if you have not! So, when I told her that she must take the child and leave the house, she submitted at once. She said she knew she ought to go, and she would go, without delay. So I suppose she is making her preparations now," said the elder Miss Orkney.

Ora regarded her in mute rage.

("Oh, you sour, bitter, hard, harsh, cruel, malignant monster of an old maid! You goaded my meek child to that! You shall ask her pardon, or be thrust out of the house yourself!")

These were the words that came in a torrent to the lips of the justly enraged girl, but she forced them back, nearly choking herself with suppressed fury, and after a few moments of such mental conflict, said quite calmly:

"I am going to Bevvie to put a stop to these preparations for departure. She shall not leave the house!"

"Oresta! Stop! Listen to me before you leave the room!" said Miss Constantia eagerly, as her niece turned to go out.

"What have you to say to me?" inquired Ora.

"This, then: You say that Bevvie Boone shall not leave the house."

"No; she shall not!" firmly repeated Ora.

"Then I can tell you, miss, that you will have to choose between your father's virtuous, honorable sisters and that wicked, ruined girl who has brought discredit on herself and you. And if she does not leave this

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house, this day, I and my sister will go, never to return!"

And having fired this heavy shot, Miss Constantia sat back in her chair, folded her arms, and grimly awaited the result.

Ora, with her hand on the knob of the door, smiled derisively and said:

"My dear Aunt Constantia, I beg that you and my good Aunt Marcia will honor me with your company as long as you can possibly make it convenient to do so. But my adopted daughter, Bevvie, must remain here under any circumstances."

"We cannot stop in the same house with a person of that description, and you know it, Oresta. Either that girl or else I and my sister leave this house this day. You must choose between her and us!" angrily exclaimed Miss Constantia.

"And I will not choose between you! I will keep Bevvie. I will compel her to stay, having some authority over her. I cannot compel you, having no authority over you. But I cordially invite you to stay."

"We will not unless the girl is sent away," said Miss Orkney senior grimly.

"Oo—oome!" moaned Mrs. Mossop in the depths of her armchair.

"Then I have no more to say to you. I am going to find my dear child Bevvie," said Ora, as she opened the door and left the room.

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CHAPTER XV

ORA AND BEVVIE

Ora hurried upstairs, where the first object that met her view was Old Uncle Charley coming down the attic steps with a packing trunk on his shoulders.

"What are you doing with that?" demanded the young lady.

"Please, mist'ess, I's a-takin' of it inter Miss Bevvie's room, 'cordin' to orders. 'Pears like Miss Bevvie's had a fallin' out 'long o' de ole mist'esses and is a-gwine 'way. Is dat so, mist'ess?" inquired the old man, pausing at the foot of the stairs with the trunk on his shoulders.

"No; it is not so. Take that trunk back again," replied Miss Orkney.

"Take de trunk back 'g'in, young mist'ess, did yer say?" inquired the old negro, with a stupid and puzzled look.

"Yes; back up into the attic where you got it from."

"But Miss Bevvie ax me; she say would I fetch it down inter her room, an' I say yes, an' I fetch it; an' here it is, young mist'ess," said Old Charley, with a perplexed and hesitating air.

"And I tell you to turn about and carry that trunk up into the attic and replace it exactly where you found it. Do you mean to obey me, or stand there arguing?"

"To 'bey you, of course, young mist'ess," said the old man, fixing the trunk more securely on his shoulders, and turning around to reascend the stairs.

Ora opened the door of Bevvie's room, and entered upon a scene of confusion, indicating a removal. Bu-

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reau drawers stood wide open, and their contents were piled upon tables or hung over chairs.

In the midst of the confusion stood Bevvie with pale cheeks, red eyes, and trembling hands, trying to fold the baby's slips for packing. Betsy, the housemaid, was helping her at the same work. Rachel, the nurse, stood with the child in her arms, looking on.

At first, Ora's sorrow and indignation would not let her speak. She pushed a load of dresses off an arm-chair, and sank into it half fainting with exhaustion after the severe ordeals she had passed through that day.

"Rachel and Betsy, leave the room! I have some matters to talk over with your young lady," said Ora, as soon as she could command her voice.

The two colored women slowly and reluctantly obeyed. They had perceived that something had gone wrong, and they were full of curiosity to know what it was.

When the door had closed behind them, Ora demanded of her protégé:

"What madness is this?"

"Oh, you know, Ora! You know too well!" exclaimed Bevvie, dropping the slip she was folding and sinking at the feet of her benefactress, and burying her face in the young lady's lap.

Ora bowed her head until her golden-brown tresses mingled with Bevvie's raven black ones, and whispered:

"You shall not leave me, my own darling. My home is your home as long as you shall need it. You and I shall never part. You shall never go from me until you are claimed by your husband."

"Oh, my Ora, my angel, will that ever be? It is nearly a year since he left me, and not one word has been heard of him since he went away. Will he ever

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come back?" moaned Bevvie, in a smothered voice, for she had not raised her head from Ora's lap.

"We will hope so, my darling. Many accidents happen by sea and land. Some such may have prevented him from coming or writing."

"Oh, Ora, if I had not known the ship by which he sailed for Europe, and had not been assured that he had embarked on that ship by seeing his name on the list of passengers published in the New York papers, I should think that he had been lost at sea. But I read his name in the list of departures in New York and subsequently in the list of arrivals at Havre. Besides, the ship in which he sailed has never had an accident. She is still afloat."

"I do not think that I remember her name. What was it, Bevvie?"

"Oh, I remember it well enough. It was the Bevis. He said he liked the name because it resembled mine. That fixed the name in my memory. And I have watched in the papers the coming and going of the Bevis, thinking that some day it might bring my husband home to me."

"As it surely will, I feel a presentiment," said the young lady.

"Heaven grant it soon! And now, my Ora, my angel, let me get up and go on with my packing," sighed Bevvie, rising.

"Your packing? What do you mean? Have I not told you that you shall not leave me?"

"Oh, Ora! my darling, my angel!" exclaimed the girl, dropping once more on the floor and laying her head in the lap of her benefactress. "Let me go! Please let me go! Do not keep me here, a firebrand to kindle discord in your family! I cannot bear it. Let me go!"

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"You poor, deluded child, where could you go? Who would protect you?"

"Oh, Ora, Heaven would protect me in doing what is right. I have some money saved for this very contingency. And I have some skill to earn money. I could give music or drawing lessons, or I could paint china, or color valentines and cards. I would go to some large city and try it."

"You foolish, inexperienced girl. Don't you know that there are hundreds of destitute ladies as accomplished as you are and with friends to push their interests, who are half-starving in these large cities?"

"Is that true?" sighed Bevvie.

"Yes, it is true. And even if it were not; if, on the contrary, an avenue to wealth were open to you through these accomplishments of yours, I would not let you leave me. And you would not go in opposition to my commands, Bevvie, my child."

"I do not know. Perhaps I ought to go, even under those circumstances, Ora. Perhaps it is my duty."

"Then you would drive me to use my authority as your guardian—the authority I have held ever since I came of age—to coerce you to stay."

"And would you do that, Ora?"

"Undoubtedly I would."

"Then I will not drive you to such extremes by my rebellion," exclaimed Bevvie, suddenly starting to her feet.

Then throwing her arms around the neck of her benefactress, she fondly kissed her, saying:

"Oh, my Ora! My angel! You know I did not want to leave you, but the old ladies ordered me to go. And the same love of you and thought for you that gave me courage to confess my folly first to Mr. Conrad Orkney

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and then to the old ladies, gave me more courage when needed to break the tie between us and leave you, though my heart, too, should break."

"My darling Bevvie! My darling child! As if you could imagine that I would let you go," said Ora, folding the girl closely to her bosom.

So intently had been both the young women upon the question being discussed between them, that they had heard, without heeding, certain significant sounds of opening and shutting doors, walking, talking, and pulling and dragging that had been going on up and down stairs and in the halls.

But while Ora still held Bevvie in her arms the sound of rolling wheels was heard to draw up before the lower hall door.

At the same moment Old Charley rapped at the chamber door.

Ora went and opened it.

"Ef yer please, ma'am, de ole mist'esses is gwine 'way, an' I t'ought how I had better come an' 'form yer," said the old man.

"Certainly, Charley. Thank you," said Ora, as she passed him and ran swiftly down the stairs.

Sure enough, there were the two old ladies standing, bonneted and cloaked, and ready for their ride.

And through the open hall door was seen their traveling carriage and horses, with their trunk strapped on behind, and Conrad Orkney giving directions to the coachman.

"Why, you are not going away really, aunties?" inquired Ora, somewhat dismayed at the promptitude of her relatives.

"Yes, indeed. This is no place for respectable women to tarry," said Miss Orkney, senior.

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At this moment other wheels were heard approaching, and old Mr. Goodwin was seen to drive up, jump from his gig, and rush into the hall.

"How do you do? How do you do? How do you do?" he exclaimed, shaking hands all around.

Then seeing the preparations for immediate departure, he called out:

"Why, what's all this? You are making a very short stay, my friends."

"Yes, Mr. Goodwin! We are compelled to leave this house! It is, I assure you, a very improper place for discreet women to remain!" said Miss Constantia, bridling up.

"Pooh, pooh! Nonsense! Fiddlesticks-ends! You are a couple of—most estimable ladies!" (disgusting old idiots, was what he meant to say, but didn't). "Into the parlor, and off with your bonnets. I have got the most astounding news that ever raised your hair on end! And at the same time the most delicious morsel of gossip that was ever rolled under the tongue of a church sewing circle, at conference time. Call the family together! Call the servants! I want an audience!"

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CHAPTER XVI

THE SQUIRE'S STORY

Lo! this world is rich in blessings;
  Earth and Ocean, Fire and Air,
Have unnumbered secrets still
To be mastered when man will,
  For our mortal uses here.
Science is a child as yet,
  But her power and scope shall grow,
And her triumphs in the future
  Shall diminish want and woe;
Shall extend the bounds of pleasure
  With an ever-widening ken,
And of woods and wildernesses
  Make the homes of happy men.

—CHARLES MACKAY.

ORA, Bevvie, Mrs. Mossop, Miss Orkney, and, lastly, Mr. Conrad Orkney, followed Mr. Goodwin into the long drawing-room.

Ora wheeled the large armchair out from its corner, and pressed the newcomer to take it.

Mr. Goodwin dropped into its comfortable cushions, and the whole party drew chairs and seated themselves around him, eager to hear what he had to tell.

"Where are the servants?" inquired the old gentleman, looking around.

"They are about their duties. You did not really mean that they should be called, did you?" inquired Ora.

"Yes, I did. Every man servant and every maid

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servant of them all. Yes; and if there be any stranger within the gates, let him or let her come, too. And if it were possible, I should call the whole neighborhood!" emphatically responded the old squire.

"Then I must yield to your judgment, and obey you in blind faith, Mr. Goodwin," said Ora, and she left the room to summon the domestics.

She found Pepper—her own coachman, whom she had left at Owlwood, and who had driven the carriage when the old ladies came to visit her—waiting in the hall, as if for orders.

"Beg yer pardon, my young mist'ess, but I wish yer'd take me home—I does dat—an' not leabe me no longer wid dem dere ole mist'esses at Owlwood! I doesn't like it! I calls it onlawful! I does, indeed! Onlawful de summonary way dey hauls me up to fetch roun' de carriage an' hosses to go home; and den orders me back to put 'em in de stable! Now, my young mist'ess, if yer's bound to hire me out to wait on lunacies, jes' yer please to hire me to a reg'lar 'sylum, wha dere's a reg'lar doctor to reg'late fings in a reg'lar manner, an' not leabe me 'long o' two loose lunacies like dese yere ole missises! I calls it onlawful! I does, indeed—onlawful!"

"Why, Pepper, I have no control over you! You are a free man, and may go where you please," said Ora.

"Now look yere, young mist'ess. Didn't my ole marster, wot's gone to glory, leabe me to you in his las' will an' testimony?" demanded Pepper.

"Yes; but——"

"Well, den, dat settles it! An' I 'longs to you, an' yer's got no call to heabe me 'way 'mong a lot o' lunacies."

"Pepper, I have no right to influence you."

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"I dunno wot yer's talkin' 'bout, young mist'ess."

"Pepper, don't you know that the President emancipated you, and all your race?"

"Now look yere, young mist'ess, wot's dat to do wid my ole marster's las' will an' testimony?"

"A great deal, so far as you are concerned, at least. It sets you free."

"You mean as it takes me 'way from you?"

"Yes."

"An' my old marster gone to glory, an' me lef' yere on de yeth! But I nebber was axed 'bout it, an' nebber 'greed to it—nebber! An' I upholes de will an' testimony wot lef' me to you, young mist'ess."

"I think, Pepper, you must understand that will as leaving me to you," laughed Miss Orkney.

"Yes; dat jes wot I say—lef' me to you. An' I nebber mean to leabe yer no more forebber an' ebber, worl' widout en', amen! Not but wot I won't dribe de carriage home for de ole missises, out'n good will; but arter dat I'm comin' strai't back yere to lib 'long o' you, 'cordin' to de las' will an' testimony ob him wot's gone to glory! Yer hear me good, my young mist'ess?"

"Yes, I hear you; but, really, I have not time to talk now. I want you to go to the kitchen and tell all the servants—every one of them, men and women—to come at once into the long drawing-room, to hear something that Mr. Goodwin has to say to us. Do you understand?"

"It—it ain't a fune'al?" inquired the rather dismayed negro.

"No, Pepper; of course not."

"Maybe it's a weddin'?"

"I don't think so."

"A—c'risenin', den?"

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"No; nor a christening."

"An' nobody hauled up for nuffin' bad?"

"No, Pepper, no. And I did not mean to ask you if you understood what you are all summoned for, but if you understood the message you are to take."

"Oh, yes, young mist'ess, I does. I is got to tell all de serbants—men and wimmin—to come to the long drawin'-room to hear what Marse Tomfilius got to say to 'em."

"Yes; that is it. Now go and do your errand."

"But, young mist'ess, w'en all de serbants is hauled up in dis summonary way it's 'larmin'—it is, indeed."

"There is no cause for alarm, I assure you. And you can tell them all so."

"But, young mist'ess, wot is it?"

"I do not know, Pepper. Mr. Goodwin has something to tell, and he wishes all the household to hear it. Now go and gather the servants, and assure them there is nothing to fear."

"Lor's-a-massy! I hope nobody ain't gwine to be 'cused o' nuffin'," said Pepper, as he moved off to do his errand.

Ora returned to the drawing-room and resumed her seat in the circle that closely surrounded Mr. Goodwin.

In a very few minutes hurrying, scuffling footsteps were heard along the hall, and the whole staff of household servants entered the room, bowing and courtesying, and grouped themselves respectfully just within the door, where they stood looking half frightened and half inquisitive, while they indulged in whispered criminations and recriminations.

Aunt Nelie was heard to mutter:

"I knows it! It's all 'long o' dem dere stole goods, wot dese yere low-libe town niggers made 'way wid."

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While, on the other hand, Rachel was heard to murmur:

"Tell yer all so! 'Murder will out.' An' now de w'ite quality done foun' out wot triflin', t'iebing, good-for-nuffin trash dese yere po' ign'ant country niggers is!"

"Silence! Order! Attention!" exclaimed Mr. Goodwin.

And the negroes became mute and still as stone—but staring and listening with open mouths and eyes.

"My friends," began the squire to his attentive audience, "I have a story to tell, and an object to show. Some among you may be disposed to criticize my course before I get through. That may grieve my heart, but I cannot alter my line of action."

Here the squire paused and glanced around upon his hearers. Mr. Conrad Orkney looked gravely attentive; Ora and Bevvie anxiously expectant; the negroes frightened and wondering; Mrs. Mossop nervous and trembling, and ready to cry—at she knew not what; Miss Constantia Orkney half scandalized and half inquisitive, sniffing offenses afar off.

But no one seemed inclined to speak, and so the squire resumed:

"I will first tell my story—a true story, or rather history, which came to my knowledge in fragments, and which I am only now able to relate consecutively by putting this and that together rationally. Do you follow me?"

"No!" said Miss Constantia, speaking for the company; "I don't understand a word you are saying."

"Sorry for that! I will try to speak plainly and to the point! About a year and a half ago came to this country a young German prince——"

Bevvie sitting beside Ora, started violently; but Ora

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took her hand and clasped it firmly, as a hint that she must control herself, while the squire continued:

"This prince was a boy scarcely out of leading strings. He was not heir to a throne, being only the fourth son of the third son of the younger brother of some little German grand duke, of a little grand duchy about as big as a tobacco field! Nevertheless, my friends, he was a prince and a serene highness——"

"Wha—wha—wha—wha—what has that got to do with us, Top Goodwin?" demanded Mrs. Mossop.

"You shall hear, madam. This young fellow, traveling in Canada, met a young American lady, who was making a summer tour with her friends. The beauty of young American ladies is proverbial! The beauty of this particular young American lady was the despair of all the young manhood of the day. The young prince came, saw, and (was) conquered! Like Prince Jerome Bonaparte before Betsy Patterson, like George, Prince of Wales, before Maria Fitzherbert, our German princeling, before the beautiful American girl, forgot his princely rank, forgot the infant princess to whom, in his own country, he was betrothed (probably)—forgot everything, in fact, that he should have remembered and—persuaded this beauty, whose heart he had won, to become his wife by a secret marriage——"

"Wha—wha—wha—wha—what a fool she must have been!" interpolated Mrs. Mossop.

"She was but a child, and was wooed by a young and attractive prince—a fairy prince in her eyes! This marriage was kept a dead secret. The prince at the end of his travels sailed for his native country, no doubt with many vows of fidelity and promises of return—promises and vows heavy enough to sink his ship—for, he has never been heard of since! As for the secret

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bride, she returned to her home, the home of her best friend, a young lady of rank, who was but a few years her senior. And the marriage was still kept as a dead secret from every one, even from that best friend, who had no secret from the bride! And it would still have been kept even from that faithful friend had not the natural consequences of that marriage——"

"Mr. Goodwin! recollect yourself, sir!" burst forth Miss Constantia. "If you are going to say anything indelicate or shocking, I beg to withdraw from the room!"

"Madam, I beg you will not be alarmed! I shall treat this subject, let us say—gingerly. The young bride, then, driven to desperation, and under an extorted pledge of secrecy, confides her situation to her best friend; and that most loyal and most devoted friend respects the secret and guards the honor of her protégé, takes her off to Canada, and settles her for some months in the city where she first met her fairy prince, so that her child should be baptized and registered in the same parish wherein she and the prince had been married and had had their marriage recorded."

"Mr. Goodwin, I begin to see your drift; but I think you are telling a tale of the truth of which you can produce no proof!" said Miss Constantia Orkney.

"I beg your pardon, madam! One moment's grace! Let me go on. All seems to have gone well with the ladies' errand in Canada. But in due time they come home, bringing a little prince with them, as the adopted child of the heiress, the elder of these two friends. It was an unprecedented proceeding! The kinswomen of the heiress refuse to receive her in the old farmhouse. She goes to her own patrimonial house. Her neighbors, taking the cue from her kindred, refuse to visit

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her! The bloodhounds of slander are let loose upon her, to hunt her down! to destroy her! Curiously enough, it is not on the mother of this unknown babe that persecution unto death falls, but on their humane protectress! Only her heroism has saved her from despair and death."

Ora's color came and went; but she held fast the hand of Bevvie, whose face was as white as marble.

Marble, too, seemed the form of Conrad Orkney, as he sat erect, attentive, silent as the sphinx.

Mrs. Mossop was crying softly behind her second best white linen pocket handkerchief.

Miss Constantia was drawn up stiffly with her black-mittened hands crossed on her lap.

The negroes stood perfectly still, not understanding the drift of "Ole Marse Tomfilius'" discourse, but suspecting that he was relating a moral story that had nothing to do with their private lives.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PROOFS

Miss Constantia was first to break the short silence that had followed the squire's last words.

"Mr. Goodwin, it is in vain to deny that we all understand what you mean by the story you have told us, although you have mentioned no names! And no doubt you yourself fully believe this story, which has, of course, been imposed upon you by interested parties; but, sir, you have no proof of its truth; and we decline to accept it without proof!"

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"Quite right, madam! Quite right! No one would accept it without proof; nor have I asked you to do so! But you have not heard me to the end! My tale is not finished, and you should not pronounce judgment on unfinished work! Have I your permission to proceed, madam?" rather sarcastically inquired Mr. Goodwin.

"Certainly, certainly, sir; go on," said Miss Constantia.

"Well, then, this morning, ay! this very morning, while I was grieving at heart for the great wrong done my dear young friends, and wondering how I could defend them—for this morning I was in total ignorance of the story I have just told you—this morning, I say, I was invited by Tom Arlington and Peter Farnsworth to join them in a fox hunt. I was so angry with the conduct of their women folks toward my friends that I was half inclined to refuse them, but I reflected that they were not responsible for the folly of their foolish wives and sisters, and so I agreed to join them, hoping also to have an opportunity of broaching the subject and defending my young friends. So I mounted and rode off with them. We rode into the woods of Umbra and beat the covert where Cave Creek crosses the road. We soon started a fine fox that took up the dry bed of the creek—you know there has been no rain for three weeks and the creek is as dry as your lawn, Ora. Well! the fox took up the dry bed of Cave Creek and led us such a chase as we never had before! It was a seven-mile run without drawing rein, that brought us at last into a tortuous ravine of the mountains that overhang the Umbra, higher up, and where those inaccessible caves are said to be. There the fox shot into a hole, into which the smallest hound could not follow him. We were baffled and had to call off the dogs. But as

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we turned our horses' heads, I saw a paper in the crevice of the rocks. Feeling some curiosity as to how a paper could have reached a ravine into which I felt sure no human being had penetrated before us, I went to the spot and pulled out, not one paper, but several. Arlington and Farnsworth were laughing at me as I was examining them.

"'Well, what treasure have you found?' Tom said.

"'Yes; what lost deed or missing will has turned up there?' Peter asked.

"'Boys,' I said to them, 'our beasts have had a hard run. Suppose you both dismount, as I have done, and let them rest for a few minutes, while we examine these papers. They are of importance,' I added, for I had seen enough to show me their nature, and I was determined, for reasons of my own, that they should see them, too. So Arlington and Farnsworth dismounted and came to me, and we sat down on the rocks—I was in the middle, Farnsworth on my right side and Arlington on my left. And I unfolded and read the papers under their eyes and ears. They saw as well as heard the contents; and now they have gone home to set my young friends in their true light before their neighbors."

"For goo—goo—goodness' sake, what was in them papers?" stammered Mrs. Mossop.

"I am going to tell you and to show you. Soiled and weather-stained from long exposure as they were, the writing was sufficiently legible to show that they were the attested copy of the marriage register of Frederick of Hohenfels and Agnes Belvidera Boone, and an attested copy of the baptismal register of Frederick, son of Frederick of Hohenfels and of Agnes Belvidera, his wife. Both duly signed and witnessed. Here they are,

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Conrad Orkney. Take them, read them to this company, and then tell us what you think they are worth. Give us your legal opinion," concluded the squire, handing the half-defaced documents to the young lawyer.

"Those papers were lost in the malachite casket," said Ora.

"Then you recognize them?" said Conrad, as he gravely unfolded the documents.

"Yes, I do," replied Ora.

"Dar. I knowed how it war somefin' 'bout dat stole property," muttered Nelie.

"Yes, an' you'll cotch it," responded Rachel, under her breath.

"Wot for I cotch it? I ain't done stole de malagy cask! I ain't no po' city trash nigger," retorted Nelie.

"Who you call po' trash, you low riffraff country pusson, you!"

"Silence there!" commanded Mr. Goodwin.

And dead silence fell.

"Now, Conrad, read these documents, will you?" said the squire.

Mr. Orkney first took up the copy of the marriage register and read it aloud, showing how on the 15th of September, in the year 18—, in the parish church of St. Lucie, in the Dominion of Canada, by the Rev. Pierre Rouget, Frederick von Hohenfels of Hohenschloss, in Germany, and Agnes Belvidera Boone, of Upper Umbra, in West Virginia, were united in the holy bonds of matrimony.

It was duly signed by bridegroom and by bride, by the officiating minister and by the witnes, Johann Muller. The attested copy was signed by two witnesses—

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Jean Dubois and Jacques Leroy, students of the Theological College.

And on the back of the document were written, in Ora's clear, bold hand, the following lines:

"This copy of the registered marriage of Frederick von Hohenfels and Agnes Belvidera Boone was taken by me on the 15th day of April, 18—, from the parish register in the vestry of the church of St. Lucie, in Canada, in the presence of the witnesses whose names are appended. Signed, ORESTA ORKNEY."

"There can be no doubt about the genuineness and importance of this document," said Conrad Orkney, as he passed it over to Ora and took up the next paper—the attested copy of the registry of baptism of Frederick, son of Frederick von Hohenfels and Agnes Belvidera, his wife. This was also duly signed and witnessed, and also indorsed on the back by Ora.

"This document is as genuine and important as the first," concluded Mr. Orkney, as he handed it to Ora.

"And now, my dear friends," said Mr. Goodwin, "I hope you are quite satisfied. The way in which I made out the story I told you was by putting this and that together, as I told you. Having read these papers and conned over their contents, I immediately connected them with Ora's journey last summer, and then the whole mystery became plain to me. I wish I could equally understand the mystery of these disturbances at this place. However, in respect to my young friends here, I am quite satisfied with the marriage being proved. It was a very reckless performance—'a leap in the dark,' if ever such a leap was taken! but Bevvie was a mere child courted secretly by a prince. I fear

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that ultimately this marriage will share the fate of all other such marriages between royal personages and private persons. It will be set aside by the higher powers——"

Bevvie looked up anxiously in the face of the speaker.

"Yes, my dear child, I speak the words of truth and soberness. I hope your heart is not hopelessly, irrevocably set on your fairy prince! He was probably from his cradle intended for some little princess! I hope this love and marriage of yours will pass as a morning dream and leave no cloud upon your young life. You are all right, my dear! no one can blame you! You have your 'marriage lines,' as the country girls say. No one can cast reproach upon you, my dear! But you must resign yourself to such a fate as that of Mrs. Fitzherbert and that of Madam Bonaparte; and you must console yourself with the esteem and affection of a faithful and devoted friend who has proved herself to be worth a hundred thousand fairy princes!"

"Hush! Oh, please hush, dear Mr. Goodwin! See how you distress Bevvie! Come away with me, love!" said Ora, as she took the hand of her weeping companion to lead her from the room.

"I did-did-didn't think you could 'a' been so cruel, Top Goodwin! It ain't li-li-like you!" exclaimed Mrs. Mossop.

"Madam, I am cruel only to be kind! Bevvie is a child, who was charmed and dazzled by the beauty and princely rank of her first lover, who was willing to forego his royal state for her sake; but she committed a grave error by yielding herself to that secret marriage—a marriage that, however legal and holy it may be, will certainly be set aside. It is absurd to think that it will be allowed to stand. So the child's infatuation must

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not be fed on false hopes to foster its growth into an incurable passion. On the contrary, it must be discouraged by just such dampers as I have put upon it to-day, until it dies out."

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Goodwin! If Bevvie is married she has a right to her husband's name and rank; and she should insist upon them," said Miss Constantia, bridling.

"She will not, and she is right. If I were a lady, forsaken either by lover or husband, I should have too much self-respect to pursue him," said the squire.

Then turning to the group of gaping negroes, he said:

"My good people, you may now go and finish your quarrel in the kitchen."

The latter promptly availed themselves of the permission and retreated to the rear of the house to renew their recriminations in regard to the stolen malachite casket. And soon after their departure the family conference in the drawing-room broke up.

The two old ladies went upstairs to take off their bonnets; their hurry to depart was over.

Mr. Goodwin and Conrad Orkney walked out on the piazza, for the November day was beautiful and glowing with the golden haze of Indian summer.

Mr. Goodwin threw himself down into an armchair, and taking his pipe and a double-headed steel box containing matches in one end and tobacco in the other, from his pocket, he proceeded to light his pipe and smoke, saying between the puffs:

"I have invited myself to stay to dinner here to-day. I have had quite enough riding for the present, from Welcoming to Cave Ravine and from Cave Ravine to Hall-in-Umbra."

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"My cousin will, no doubt, be glad to have you here," was Mr. Orkney's reply.

"My dear boy, whom are you assuring? Why, I am as much at home here as with my own daughters."

Meanwhile Ora had led her distressed protégé up to their mutual chamber, where Bevvie dropped sobbing into a chair.

"Do not take everything Mr. Goodwin says for gospel, Bevvie! He is not infallible," said Miss Orkney.

"Oh, but, Ora, what he says is so rational, so plausible, and is so well borne out by facts and circumstances," wept Bevvie.

"By appearances, you mean, dear, and by appearances only. Hope is not dead, Bevvie."

"Yes, it is, or in its death struggles! Ora! if Fritz has not forsaken me, he is dead! And if I had not seen in the newspapers the safe arrival of the ship in which he sailed, at its port of Havre, I should believe it had been wrecked at sea and he—lost; but I know that could not have been. I fear he has forsaken me! I fear that Mr. Goodwin is right! But, there! I will weep no more to distres you, my Ora, my angel!" said Bevvie, resolutely dashing the tears from her eyes, and rising and going to the corner washstand to bathe them.

"That is right, my brave girl," said Ora.

Bevvie had scarcely finished washing and wiping her face when there came a gentle tap at the door, and Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia came in.

"My dear Oresta," commenced the elder Miss Orkney, "my sister and self have come to express our regrets to you and your young friend for the misconstruction of your conduct into which false appearances alone had led us. For myself, I am very sorry——"

"So-so-so am I very sorry!" added Mrs. Mossop.

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"I hope that henceforth we may be good friends," said Miss Constantia, holding out to each of the young women a hand that they cordially grasped.

Mrs. Mossop put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Don't cry, Aunt Marcie," said Ora, kissing her chubby cheek.

"Mar-mar-marcie, indeed! It's little marcie I've showed you, honey," whimpered the penitent old lady.

"Come," said Ora, to break up the trying scene, "shall we return to the drawing-room? Dinner will soon be ready."

They all went downstairs, and were met in the hall by the gentlemen, who having finished their pipes were re-entering the house.

Dinner was announced at the same moment, and the whole party repaired to the dining room.

Later in the day Conrad Orkney found an opportunity of speaking aside to his cousin, while Mr. Goodwin was devoting himself to Miss Constantia with good-natured gallantry, and Mrs. Mossop was trying to antidote the squire's discouragement of Bevvie by talking of hope and faith to the melancholy girl. As the company had paired off in this manner, Conrad finding himself seated beside Ora, on a corner sofa, at some distance from the others, put the question:

"Now, my dearest dear, that you are so entirely vindicated, even your morbid delicacy can have no pretext for further delay in our union. Now, will you content me by fixing a day for our marriage?"

"No, Conrad! For your own good, no!"

"I wish you would allow me to be the judge of my own good, and to find it in a closer union with yourself! Now that you are so entirely vindicated, what possible

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reason can you now advance for delaying my happiness?"

"Let me explain, Conrad! I am vindicated, you say! Yes, to my own kindred! but—I must be vindicated to the whole community, and—they must make the *amende honorable* to me, before I will join my fate to yours."

"Ora, you are too proud and irrational!"

"No; I am just and self-respectful. Wait a little longer, Conrad. I know that this vindication is but the beginning of our triumph."

Their talk was interrupted by the appearance of Old Charley and the announcement of tea.

An hour later Mr. Goodwin took leave of his friends, entered his carriage, and started for home.

CHAPTER XVIII

FAIR WEATHER FRIENDS

Mrs. Mossop and Miss Orkney, senior, remained at Hall-in-Umbra much longer than they had originally intended. Their presence rendered that of Conrad Orkney fit and proper, and as the young barrister was now taking his short annual vacation, he determined to spend it with his betrothed, chaperoned as she was by their two aunts.

Three days passed in quiet, for it took full three days for Bevvie's romantic story, which was Ora's perfect vindication, to travel around the neighborhood and reach every fireside.

Then "the winter of their discontent" was over, the

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ice of non-intercourse was broken, and a flood of neighborly kindness set in.

Perhaps it was because the matrons and patriarchs of the place, on learning the truth, felt a real regret and remorse for their unjust suspicions and cruel treatment of their old friend Orestes Orkney's orphan daughter, and wished to make her full amends. Perhaps they wished to renew acquaintance with their two old companions, Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia Orkney, whom they knew to be staying at the hall. Perhaps they felt some curiosity to look upon the adopted daughter of the young heiress and judge for themselves of the beauty of that face which had turned the head of the young German prince, or perhaps, as was most likely, all these motives mixed together acted upon the gentry of the neighborhood.

At all events, on the fourth day, which happened to be a Friday, the influx of visitors began, and continued without an hour's interval through the whole of that day and Saturday.

They one and all manifested the greatest delight at seeing the younger Miss Orkney and at renewing the acquaintance of the elder one and of her widowed sister; and all expressed the greatest interest in the story of Bevvie's marriage and the utmost admiration of Ora's devotion to the young wife.

They every one seemed to have forgotten their own ill treatment of the young heiress, and Ora, on her part, was good humoredly willing to ignore their bad behavior on that point.

Only in one particular were all the visitors disappointed—they could not get a sight of Bevvie, the beauty who had turned the head of the German prince. Every

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one of the visitors asked to see her, but was told that she was indisposed.

True! She was indisposed, very much indisposed—to see visitors.

Neither arguments nor persuasions could induce her to change her mind.

"No, Ora," she answered; "no; until my state is assured in one way or another! Has it ever occurred to you what an embarrassment it would be to introduce me? How, for instance, could you do it? You could not present me as Miss Bevvie Boone. That would be neither true nor proper; nor could you present me by my marriage title; for that, under present circumstances, would be extremely ridiculous."

Ora laughed merrily.

"Now what are you laughing at?" inquired Bevvie.

"I was thinking how our visitors get over the embarrassment to which you have alluded."

"How do they, then? Tell me. I should like to know for whom they inquire when they ask for me."

"Some—Mrs. Arlington, for instance—inquire ambiguously if they 'are not to have the pleasure of making the acquaintance of my charming friend.' Others—Mrs. Farnsworth, to wit—'beg to know when they may have the honor of being presented to the princess'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Bevvie; "that is really 'almost quite too awfully' absurd! Well, Ora, I do not intend to make a spectacle of myself, or create an embarrassment to you. I shall keep in retirement for the present, at all events," concluded Bevvie.

On Sunday the whole party from Hall-in-Umbra went to church, in two carriages—Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia Orkney in the Owlwood chariot, driven by Pepper, and Ora and Bevvie in their own pony chaise,

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driven by Conrad Orkney, who had taken Old Charley's seat, much to the disgust of the latter.

"I s'pose he's comin' yere to be marser afore long! Den I fink I shall 'mancipate 'way f'om yere! I allers could get along wiv missuses, but I nebber could wiv marsers!" he said, in strict confidence to Nelie.

Meanwhile the carriages had entered the beautiful woods of Umbra, which had not yet, even in these early November days, lost many of their glowing leaves.

It was a lonely drive through the woods, for the road led nowhere but from Hall-in-Umbra to the turnpike, five miles off.

A little less than an hour's time brought them to the spot where Cave Creek crossed their road.

The three weeks' drought had dried it up, so that the travelers did not stop as usual to let the horses drink.

Nevertheless, they paused for a moment to look again at the scene of Old Charley's weird night adventure and the open pathway that providentially led to the discovery of the lost papers.

"Wha-wha-what was it that the old nigger saw here, anyway, Ora?" called Mrs. Mossop to her niece in the pony chaise behind.

And while the horses rested, Ora briefly told the story of that night's adventure.

"Niggers is so superstitious that they 'magine all sorts o' things," was Mrs. Mossop's comment.

"Yes; and I dare say it was only a 'coon, after all, that he saw, and his fears transformed it into a monster," added Miss Constantia.

"I won-won-der which was the tree he saw the creetur' in," said Mrs. Mossop.

"It must have been that one," replied Ora, pointing to an aged oak, whose branches were enfolded in the

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toils of a gigantic old grapevine overhanging the creek on the right hand side.

"I have my private opinion about that adventure," said Bevvie.

"And what may that be, my little lady?" inquired Ora.

"I think Old Charley had real, and not imaginary cause for fright. I think he saw the 'What is it.' "

"And what is the 'What is it'?" inquired Conrad Orkney, coming into the conversation.

"Oh, it is our mysterious disturber at Hall-in-Umbra, which, for the want of a better name, Bevvie has begun to call a 'What is it,' after a certain *lusus naturæ* exhibited by a noted showman some years ago," replied Ora.

"A mysterious disturber at Hall-in-Umbra, did you say?"

"Yes; you must surely have heard of the disturbances there. They have made a sensation, I do assure you."

"I have heard of them, but did not think them worth attention. Of what nature were these disturbances?"

"I will tell you later. Now we have no more time to lose! See, Pepper has driven on."

Mr. Orkney bowed and started the pony.

Another hour's drive through the deep woods brought them out to the turnpike that crossed their road at right angles and ran along the outer edge of the wood.

They turned sharply to the left, and drove toward the Lower Umbra Ferry.

Here they were no longer alone. Other carriages from the neighborhood were on their way to church.

They overtook and passed some that were creeping along at a slower rate than their own; and they were in their turn overtaken and passed by others that were going at a faster speed.

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Ah, what a contrast in many respects this Sunday was to the preceding one!

No averted faces sent a chill to their hearts this day. Smiling countenances beamed warmly upon them from the passing carriages.

And when they reached the church no backs were abruptly turned, but eager hands were held out to greet them.

Ora did not coldly and resentfully repel the advances, but cordially and sincerely received them.

She did not present Bevvie, who kept her thick veil down and hid herself behind all her party.

"Proud little minx, I suppose she thinks she is too good for us," was the silent and most unjust comment of many of these people; for poor Bevvie thought she was scarcely good enough.

When they went into the church, Bevvie ensconced herself in the farthest corner of the pew, and kept her veil down, conscious throughout the whole service of being stared at by all who had her figure in their range of vision.

When the service was over and she found herself once more outside the church walls, she whispered to Ora:

"If I am to disturb people's devotions, I had better not come here any more."

"Hush, dear. It is only this one time that you can be so annoyed, when people first see you after hearing such a romantic story of you as Mr. Goodwin has circulated. You will see that they will get used to you and cease to stare."

"It is to be hoped so, indeed," replied Bevvie, lowering her veil and beating a rapid retreat to the rear of

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her party, for the people were pouring out of the church and many of them coming up to greet Ora.

"Shall I take your friend to the chaise to wait for you?" inquired Conrad Orkney, in a low voice, of his cousin.

"Yes, thank you, Conrad. I am sure she would be glad to go."

Mr. Orkney stepped back, silently offered his arm to Bevvie, who gratefully took it, and he led her to the chaise and left her seated there, while he returned to Ora.

After a little friendly chat with the neighbors, Conrad and Ora rejoined Bevvie, and they drove out of the churchyard amid the bows and smiles of their friends.

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CHAPTER XIX

ALL COMES RIGHT

Straight from the hand of God comes many a gift
  Fraught with healing and with consolation
  For a world of toil and tribulation;
And yet from which we blindly shrink and shift
As from a burden onerous to lift.
  Work itself—hard, drudging occupation—
  Comes in shape of blessed dispensation
To those who wisely can perceive the drift
  Of such a boon t' assuage the pangs of mind;
Sadness, suspense, anxiety, or worse,
  Rankle from wounding words or looks unkind,
The desolation of friends' eyes averse,
  Nay, e'en the anguish of a recent loss,
  Akin to what was felt beneath the cross.

—ANONYMOUS.

ON the Monday succeeding that ovation at the church, invitations to dinner and tea parties began to pour into Hall-in-Umbra.

These were worded very simply, and addressed to Miss Orkney and friends, and were understood to include Mrs. Mossop, Miss Constantia Orkney, Mr. Conrad Orkney and Bevvie.

Ora, in the goodness of her heart, accepted all these invitations, and went out accompanied by either Mrs. Mossop or Miss Constantia, and escorted by Mr. Conrad Orkney.

Bevvie declined every invitation, and stayed home in company of Miss Constantia or Mrs. Mossop.

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The gentlemen of the neighborhood had organized their fox hunting, and made out their programme for the season.

The master of the fox hounds for that year was Mr. Theophilus Goodwin.

The first meet was fixed for Wednesday of that week, at Silver Rill, a little stream that took its rise in Mount Umbra, trickled down among bristling crags and stunted pines to the level, and then ran along the edge of the woods of Umbra on the west side.

Mr. Goodwin invited Mr. Conrad Orkney to the meet, and to the dinner at Welcoming that would follow in the evening when the hunt should be over.

Conrad, who in his earlier youth had been an ardent sportsman, having no engagement for the day, readily accepted the invitation.

On the morning in question he left Hall-in-Umbra at an early hour.

Ora and her lady friends remained at home. It was not the custom in that neighborhood for ladies to follow the hounds, or even to ride to the meet to see the start.

That day the four ladies spent quietly at home. For a wonder they did not have even one visitor.

In the evening, after an early tea, they were gathered around the center table, on which stood a lighted kerosene lamp, in the old oak parlor, which was warmed and cheered by a glowing hickory wood fire.

Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia were busy with knitting white yarn stockings for their own winter wear.

Ora was making a cap for her Aunt Marcie.

Bevvie was embroidering a slip for her baby.

Mrs. Mossop spoke:

"Nelie tel—tel—tells me that that poor, lost and

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ruined creetur He—He—Hera has come back to the place."

"Yes, Aunt Mossop."

"Wha—wha—what does she want here?"

"She is trying to find her child—little Meenie—whom all the people about here believed that she had taken away with her when she left the farm."

"And ha—ha—hadn't she?"

"No, Aunt Marcie. She left her here, it seems, thinking that the child would be safer here for a time."

"Pit—pit—pity she couldn't a-seen as she herself would a-been safer, too."

"Ah! Aunt Marcie, the poor, simple, ignorant creature was deceived by the tales that were told. She expected to marry a rich man, live in a fine house, and then send for her child."

"An—an—and 'stead o' that she went to her ruin. I see."

"It will not bear talking about, Aunt Marcie."

"Well, I won't talk o' her. But what could a 'come o' that child?"

"Oh, poor little one, nobody knows. All inquiries have proved fruitless. She disappeared at the time her mother was missing, and no one has ever seen her, or even heard of her since. I should think that she had been stolen or carried off, only that I cannot imagine any motive any one could have for stealing her; or I should suppose that she might have wandered off in the woods and perished, only her body must have been found before this. So you see we are all quite mystified. The poor mother, still hoping against hope, has wandered off all over the country visiting and inquiring at every farmhouse within a circuit of many miles, and

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has come back here disappointed in her search; but still she goes."

"Ser—ser—serves her right for leaving her child to run after the soldiers."

"Oh, Aunt Marcie! You'd pity her if you could see her," said Ora.

Mrs. Mossop made no reply; but her thoughts having been turned to the home of her youth, she sank into a reverie that lasted until she suddenly roused herself to inquire:

"What ever did become of the Old Cave Man?"

"The Old Cave Man? I don't think—stop, let me see. Do you mean the old root and herb doctor?" inquired Ora.

"Yes; that's the one I me—me—mean! Ole free nigger! Used to live in the wo—wo—woods, or the caves, or some place, I forget! And used co—co—come round with yarbs to sell."

"Why, do you know I haven't heard of him for years. I had forgotten all about him! But, then, remember that I was but little over five years old when I was taken away from here and put to school. I suppose the old man has gone to heaven long ago."

"I reckon so, too, honey! But he—he—he was nothing near so old as—as—as Aunt Judy and Aunt Jenny, and the niggers here tel—tel—tell me they are living yet."

"Yes; they are living and well! Tough, round organizations, without the slightest germ of disease, age seems to have hardened them. And they are said to be over a hundred years old. Are they so, Aunt Marcie?"

"Yes, honey, that—that—that, every day of it! Con—Con—Constancy, tell her about it," said Mrs. Mossop,

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to whom a sustained narrative would have been a burden.

Miss Constantia, thus drawn into the conversation, said:

"Aunt Judy, the elder of the two negro women, was a Guinea negro, and claimed to have been the daughter of a king. She was brought over on the first slave ship that came to our shores, being then, as far as could be judged, a jet black girl of about fourteen, though, with the precocity of her race and clime, she was soon to be a mother. She was bought by our great-great-grandfather, Cyrus Orkney; and soon after he brought her to his farm, on the James River, her child was born, a girl as black as herself. This was Jenny. Both mother and child were christened together, and given the names by which they are still known. These women have never been separated. In youth and middle age they worked together in the field; in the decline of life they worked together in the cabins at the lighter labor of carding wool or winding yarn. And now, in extreme old age, they seem to vegetate together in their woodland hut. Judy never had another child. I suppose——"

But Miss Constantia's supposition was cut short by the sudden trampling of horses' feet on the drive before the door—a disturbance that took off the attention of all her auditors.

A few moments after, Old Charley opened the front door to admit Mr. Conrad Orkney, who only stopped to hand the old servant his hat and gloves, and then went at once into the oak parlor to be welcomed by the smiles of his friends.

"A pleasant day, Conrad?" inquired Miss Constantia.

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"Very! We had a glorious run—of nine miles, I think—and——"

"Where did you kill the fox?" inquired Miss Constantia.

"We did not kill him anywhere!" laughed Conrad. "At the end of that fine run he got clear off!"

"So glad!" exclaimed Ora heartily.

"What!" cried Mr. Orkney.

"I am very glad the fox got off! You know, Conrad, that I never could see anything fine, manly, or admirable in a pack of hounds and mounted men chasing and running down one poor little frightened quadruped, and I am always glad when it gets off."

"You surprise me, Ora. I had no idea that these were your sentiments. I have been a fox hunter since my boyhood."

"Well, you know my opinion now, Conrad, and I hope you will think it worth considering."

"And combating," said the young lawyer, with a good humored smile, as he threw himself into a chair. "But though we did not kill the fox, we had an adventure that compensated us for that disappointment."

"An adventure!' exclaimed the four ladies in a breath.

"Yes! It was when we were coming home, riding along the west side of Silver Rill. Arlington had a couple of young hounds, scarcely trained yet. When we had got within a mile of the crossroads these two dashed into the woods, after something, we could not tell what! We called them, but they would not come out. We could hear them barking. We dismounted and crossed the rill, which was nearly dry, and entered the woods and went after them, guided by their bark. We found them about a hundred yards within the thicket, barking

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up a tree. We thought they had treed a 'coon, but as we were not after that sort of game we called the dogs off, and finally lashed them off and sent them howling before us."

"Was that your adventure?" inquired Miss Constantia, in a deprecating tone.

"Wait a moment! Arlington went on with his hounds. I walked leisurely, when I was startled by a sudden noise behind me as of a breaking and crashing through dry bush. I looked behind and saw something coming down through the tree up which the dogs had barked, and cracking and breaking the dry twigs as it descended. Even as I gazed it dropped to the ground, started up, and leaped off to the interior of the woods and was lost to sight before I could make out what it really was."

"Wha—wha—what did it look like?" inquired Mrs. Mossop.

"Like a monster belonging to neither the bird, beast, nor human species! That was all that I could judge of it in the brief glimpse that I got."

"I should not wonder if it were the same creature seen at Cave Creek by Old Charley. Indeed, I think it must be the same," remarked Ora.

"Ay; but what is it?" inquired Mr. Orkney.

"Ah, indeed, what is it? We cannot tell! Old Charley endeavored to describe it as something like an owl, something like a porcupine and something like a dog."

"Lucid!" remarked Mr. Orkney.

"And I should really suspect it to be identical with the being that I have come to call our 'disturber,' were there not a material impossibility in any creature getting in and out of a chamber through locked and barred and bolted doors and windows," said Ora.

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"Perhaps it was concealed in the room," suggested Mr. Orkney.

"No; that was not so. The room was thoroughly searched before we secured it for the night; and the 'specter' appeared in the 'wee sma' hours,' and after going through the most frightful pantomime, vanished, before door or window could be unfastened."

"Wonderful! and but that you vouch for the fact, I should say incredible, Ora."

At this moment Old Charley opened the door to say, "Marse Con'ad, tea is on de table."

"Come, Conrad," said Ora, rising to lead the way to the dining room. "You know that our aunties could not wait beyond their usual hour, so you and I will have to take our tea together."

The young lawyer arose briskly. He had no objection whatever to this tête-à-tête refreshment.

"Well, Ora," he said, as they sat together at the table, "I think our old neighbors have now made the *amende honorable*. What do you say?"

"I think they have," replied the young lady, as she filled his cup and handed it to him.

"And you remember your promise?" he continued, as he took the cup and set it untasted by his plate.

"My promise! Which promise? I have made so many lately! I have promised Old Charley and Pepper that they may have the two dogs to go 'coon hunting the first clear moonlight night," said Ora saucily.

Conrad leaned back in his chair, looked at her gravely, and replied:

"You gave me your word that you would fix a day for our marriage as soon as you should have received the *amende honorable* from your neighbors."

"Did I so? Yes; I know I did! But in point of fact,

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Conrad, I hardly expected to receive this so soon! I really thought that Bevvie and myself should remain under a cloud until her Fritz should reappear and make good his marriage vows by publicly claiming his wife."

"That marriage is made good by abundant proof. But your 'Fritz' will never reappear. The marriage will be set aside by the power of his family, just as the marriage of Prince Napoleon with Miss Patterson, and the marriage of George, Prince Regent, with Mrs. Fitzherbert, were annulled."

"But, dear Conrad, Fritz isn't a great prince, the heir of a great throne, but a petty prince, ever so many removes from the succession to his forefathers' little grand duchy."

"My dear Ora, the petty princelings and their families have a thousandfold more hauteur than the potent princes. And every one of them hopes to marry the daughter of a sovereign."

"As a rule I suppose they do; but there are exceptions. Prince Rudolf, of Keppelhausen, married the daughter of a burgomaster, and the marriage was allowed to stand."

"Yes, I know; but, my dear, 'the exception proves the rule,' you know. Besides, we are wandering from the point. I ask you whether you will keep your word with me and fix a day for our marriage," said Mr. Orkney, somewhat impatiently.

"Well, yes, Conrad, I will! I will give you my hand on the day after I resign my guardianship of Bevvie into the hands of her husband," responded Ora.

"Good heavens! You cannot mean so to prevaricate with me—so to evade your promise!" exclaimed the young lawyer indignantly.

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"But, Conrad, what can I do with Bevvie? She is on my hands. She has no other protectress!" pleaded Ora.

"But she must not be an obstacle to our marriage! Continue to protect her, if you must, but do not let her stand between us."

"Do you mean that you would be willing for Bevvie to live with us?"

"If necessary, yes. I would be willing that she should live with us rather than that I should part with you."

"Dear Conrad, that removes every difficulty! Do not think that I love Bevvie more than I love you, for I do not, indeed. But my conscience is engaged in taking care of the girl for whom I have felt responsible nearly all the days of my life to such a degree that I should deem it a duty even to sacrifice my love and my happiness to her welfare and safety. But your present generosity makes such sacrifice needless."

"But the day! the day, my dearest!"

"It shall be an early day, Conrad; but I must consult my aunts, you know."

"Shall it be within a week?"

"Oh, scarcely! I could not get ready so soon," said Ora, with a smile.

"Within ten days, then?"

"Dear Conrad, I promise you that it shall be early in January. I cannot name an earlier day. That is a very early one."

With this answer the young man was forced to be content.

"And now, Conrad, let me give you another cup of tea. You have let that one get cold," said Ora.

"No; this will do very well. I did not really want any. I only wanted this private talk with you," said the young lawyer, as he hastily swallowed his cold tea and

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arose from the table to return with his betrothed to the oak parlor.

CHAPTER XX

STRANGE GAME STARTED

NEGROES are perhaps the most imitative of all races, especially in the urbanity of social life.

The gentlemen of the neighborhood had entertained the visitor, Mr. Conrad Orkney, with fox hunts; therefore the negroes of the neighborhood determined to entertain Mr. Pepper with a 'coon hunt.

The expedition was fixed for Saturday night, when the moon would be full.

The hunters were to assemble at Hall-in-Umbra, as the guests of Mr. Charles Cornwallis, and after a fine supper in the kitchen were to start out with two dogs, and a shotgun apiece, about nine o'clock, to spend the night in hunting 'coons. That evening Betsy, the housemaid, waited on the tea table.

Ora laughingly explained to her friends that Uncle Charley was holding a reception in the kitchen in honor of his guest, Mr. Pepper, preparatory to a 'coon hunt that night.

"I thought," said Mr. Orkney, "that you objected to hunting on the ground of its cruelty."

"To fox hunting, not to 'coon hunting. The first is cruel, on account of the long protracted suffering of the poor quadruped flying for its life in an agony of terror before a pack of hounds and troop of horsemen, over miles and miles of country, until, breathless and ex-

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hausted, it falls to be torn to pieces by its pursuers! Conrad, I detest fox hunting!"

"Well, but the 'coon hunting?"

"It is not near so cruel. The negroes beat the woods all night perhaps without finding one. Or perhaps the dogs tree a 'coon, and in an instant it is shot and all is over."

"I yield the point, Ora. Fox hunting is cruel and 'coon hunting is humane," laughed Conrad, as the company arose from the table.

An hour after, through the unclosed windows of the oak parlor, they saw the hunters march away under the moonlight—four negro men, provided with guns and two dogs, eager for the fray.

As this expedition resulted in a very strange adventure, it is necessary to leave the party at Hall-in-Umbra and accompany these peculiar "moonshiners."

Uncle Charley led the way, telling of marvelous achievements of his own in the 'coon-hunting line of heroism—how he had bagged "as many as fifty ob a night sometimes, an' arterwards skinned um an' sole deir skins to de hatters in de city to make ge'men's beaver hats ob, an' deir keercuses to de butchers to make malony sassidge—'deed it's de trufe!"

"How did you get um to de city?" inquired doubting Pepper.

"Hired ob a horse an' cart an' druv dere—'deed it's de trufe!"

"Did you make much money?" asked Peter, Mr. Goodwin's coachman, who was one of the party.

"Hush, honey! I must a made fifteen or twenty dollar out o' dat one job! But dat was nuffin to wot I made in de wo, w'en the sojers was camp' out dere beyan Black Rock. Hush, chillun! didn' we make money

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den? Me an' my ole 'oman wot's gone to glory! I hunt 'coon ebery night den, an' my ole 'oman make meat pies out'n 'em an' tote to de camp, an' sell to de sojers! But plenty ob ing'uns an' leeks an' garlic in 'em to flabor um up so high nobody could tell wot sort o' meat dey was made ob anyways! Sometimes my ole 'oman—she's gone to glory now—would tell um as de pies was pork pies, or lam' pies, or eben chicken pie! 'Twar all de same to dem sojers, an' we made 'bundance o' money! 'Deed it's de trufe! But dat was in de wo!"

So talking, the party trudged along the road leading to the entrance of the Woods of Umbra, which was to be the scene of their hunt.

With the exception of one road leading from Hall-in-Umbra to the cross roads, these woods were a pathless wilderness.

"Us better go on till we come to Cave Crik, and keep up stream toward Mount Umbra. Dat be de bes' 'coon groun' in de whole county," said Peter.

"Oh-h-h! If yer gwine dar!" began Old Charley, in a spasm of fright at the recollection of his night adventure on that part of the road.

"Yes; we's gwine dar!" persisted Peter.

And his decision was supported by Mr. Colville's Sam and by Pepper.

The majority "had it."

"Mr. Pepper," began Old Charley, in a deprecating tone, "my eyesight ain't jes as good as dey used to was; to please you walk right 'fo' me in dis dark road. An' Mr. Samwell an' Mr. Peter, you two ge'men jes please walk one on one side ob me an' t'oder on t'oder! I ain't nigh as young an' fresh like as I used to was."

The good-humored and accommodating darkies saw

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no objection to this arrangement, and so Old Charley entered the haunted road well guarded.

They walked on slowly, peering to the right and left, while the dogs sniffed along the ground.

But no sign of a 'coon appeared even when they had reached the thickest part of the woods.

"If we could break frough dem trees we mought come to somethink," said Sam impatiently.

"But yer can't," said Peter. "Dey's too fick! Yer'd get yer clo's all tored offen yer back for nuffin! Jes come long de Cave Crik and turn up stream. It's as dry as a chip, so yer'll hab a clear path, as'll lead yer into de wil'est place yer ebber was in in yer life, and the fullest ob 'coons."

"Come along, den!" said Sam.

And the party trudged merrily, with the exception of Old Charley, who, as they approached the spot where Cave Creek crossed the road, felt as if he were being led to execution.

"I nebber meant to come dis yere road! No; dat I didn't!" he grumbled to himself.

In due time they reached Cave Creek.

The full moon was now directly overhead, and shone brilliantly upon the forest road and the rocky bed of the creek that crossed it, and upon the aged oak tree half strangled in the folds of a gigantic grapevine, now heavily laden with its autumnal fruit, half wilted.

"Dar! Lor' a'mighty sabe my po' ole sole, it was in dat same tree I fust sawed it!" cried Old Charley, in a terrified tone.

"Saw wot, Mr. Cornwallop?" inquired Pepper.

"De debbil, honey! De horned and hoofed debbil! Now, doan yer ax me no mo' 'bout it, 'case I can't tell yer! Not yere, I can't! Wait till we get home! Den

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I tell yer all about it!" said the old man in a trembling voice, that convinced his hearers that he had met with some terrible adventure on this spot.

They besought him to satisfy their curiosity, to tell them the whole story; but he only answered:

"Not now, chillun, an' not yere! I couldn't! I couldn't, indeed! Wait till we get home."

"But, Mr. Cornwallop, we ain't gwine home together, on'y you an' Mr. Pepper. We dem is gwine in anoder 'rection w'en dis hunt am ober," urged Mr. Colville's Sam.

"Can't help o' dat, chile! Can't tell yer nuffin' 'bout dat debbil wot I seed yere now. Mus' wait for some futur' 'casion," persisted Old Charley.

"Tell yer wot, Mr. Cornwallop! We ain't seen no sign o' no 'coon yet! I 'gins to fink as yer must hab 'stroyed dem all, w'en you and your good lady made so many pies fo' de sojers in de wo," suggested Pepper.

"No; he didn't nudder," spoke up Peter.

"Tell yer dere's plenty ob 'coons up de crik! Mr. Sam Ruggles knows dere is!"

"Yes! ebber so many! Come along!" added Sam, leading the way up the creek to the promised field of sport.

Though the bed of the creek was dry, it was deep and almost like a roofed alley from the meeting of the tree tops overhead, which shut out nearly all of the light of the full moon at its zenith.

"Ge'men, I finks I better light my lantun," said Uncle Charley. "Mr. Pepper, will you 'bleege me by holdin' of my gun a minute?"

Pepper took the offered gun and the whole party halted, while Old Charley fished for a matchbox in the depths of his pantaloons pocket, found a match, knelt

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down on the ground, struck a light, and lighted the candle in his lantern.

"Dese yere matches am a great pervention! I 'members well w'en it took me mos' half a hour to strike a light wid flint an' steel! 'Deed it's de trufe!" said the old man, as he arose from his knees, with the lantern in his left hand and held out his right one for the gun.

Then the party of four walked on, Old Charley leading the way and lighting it with his lantern.

And the farther the old man got from "the haunted spot," the higher his spirits rose, and the more wonderful grew his tales of former feats of his own in 'coon hunting and other field and forest sports.

"But wot has 'come ob all de 'coons? We ain't done seen none yet!" said Pepper, when they had walked a mile or two up the creek, and knew by the near looming of a prodigious precipice between their vision and the moonlit sky that they were approaching Mount Umbra, the site of the wondrous caves and of the source of the creek.

"Yer's comin' right inter de frick ob um! Yer'll see presently!" said Peter confidently.

And as the party trudged on, his words seemed to be justified by the conduct of the dogs that had followed them quietly enough up to this time, but that now began to make erratic dashes into the woods—on false scents it appeared, however, as they treed nothing.

A farther walk of a few hundred yards brought the party out of the thick woods and upon a narrow strip of wild, rugged, rocky ground that lay along the base of Mount Umbra, which loomed darkly up before them, shutting out all view of the moonlit western sky.

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CHAPTER XXI

BROUGHT TO BAY

"WELL, dis is de wildest, savidgest place I ebber was in, in all de days ob my pilg'imidge! I's libbed yere, man an' b'y, putty nigh onto sixty-fibe year an' nebber war yere befo'! Nebber eben knowed as dere war sich a savidge place! Surely, Mr. Ruggles an' Mr. Prevost, yer didn' mean to fetch us yere to dis awful place?" solemnly inquired Old Charley.

"I—I—I's feared we dem has los' our way!" stammered Sam.

"I knows we has! I nebber was in dese gashly parts befo'," added the dismayed Peter.

"Los' our way? How could we dem los' our way, wen we folly'd de course ob de crik all de time?" demanded the indignant Pepper.

"I—I—I's feared we has, dough! I's feared we lef' de main coorse ob de crik an' took de souf fork, in de dark. It were so easy for to do dat in de dark—it was 'fo' Mr. Cornwallop lighted de lantern we mus' a-tukken de souf fork," pleaded Sam.

"Oh, Lor', dat's wot dey calls de Debbil's Gully!" groaned Old Charley.

"An' how's we ebber to get out'n dis?" demanded Pepper.

"On'y way be to gib up 'coon huntin' fur to-night, an' turn right roun' an' go back de way we come by de Debbil's Gully, 'til it jines de crik. It can't take us nowhar else, yer know, an' w'en we gits to de crik, we kin folly it down to de old road. We can't lose our way gwine back, nohow," counseled Peter.

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"I fink Mr. Prevost is right, ge'men! Let's git 'way f'om dis gashly place! 'Deed it looks like de ole debbil hisse'f lib yere!" added Sam.

"But—ain't dere no way to git back but by de Debbil's Gully?" faltered Old Charley.

"No way 'tall, Mr. Cornwallop!" replied Peter.

"Hi! Hi! Wot's dat?" suddenly demanded Pepper, as some small animal shot across the open space and fled up a solitary tree, pursued by the dogs, which instantly crouched at its roots and began to bark up into its branches.

"It's a 'coon, yer fool!" answered Peter, forgetting the high courtesy of colored gentlemen when among themselves. "It's a 'coon! We'll kill one anyways! Come along!"

The negroes forgot their fears in the excitement of the moment and hurried up to the spot and surrounded the tree, guns in hand.

Meanwhile the dogs barked continuously.

"Kin yer sight de warmint?" inquired Old Charley.

"I can't, Mr. Cornwallop. My eyes ain't so good as dey used to was," replied Pepper.

"Who say dey was? I didn' ax you, Mr. Pepper. I knows yer ain't so berry much younger nor me. I was talkin' to dese two young ge'men ob de risin' gineration. Mr. Ruggles and Mr. Prevost, kin yer see anyfing?"

"No, Mr. Cornwallop; de foliage is so fick I can't sight de warmint at all," replied Sam.

"'Haps Mr. Prevost can?"

"No, sar; I can't. I nebber see a oak tree dis time ob de year wid so many leabes. I expects dat big mount'in in dere 'tects it from de cole blasts, and dat's de reason."

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"S'pose we fires into de frick ob de trees, an' eben ef we don't fetch down de warmint, we will move it," suggested Pepper.

This proposal met unanimous approbation. The four men placed themselves at equal distances about the tree, raised their guns, took aim into the midst of the branches, and fired a volley.

Before the report had rolled away, the little animal was seen to dart from the thick cloud of smoke overhead, strike the ground, and fly at full speed to the rugged mountain foot, pursued by the dogs, which followed it into the hole into which it had disappeared.

The four negroes ran after the dogs—Pepper, who had caught up Uncle Charley's lantern, leading the way.

They reached the hole in the mountain side, which seemed to be the mouth of a cave, from whence, amid the barking of the dogs, cries of distress that seemed almost human were heard.

"Dere's somebody in dere, sure's yer born!" exclaimed Sam Ruggles, in dismay.

"Call off de dogs. Dey might do mischief!" cried Peter Prevost.

"All you dem wot's got any candles in yer pockets, light 'em an' le's go in an' see," advised Pepper.

"Oh, Lor', chillun, done do nuffin' rash!" pleaded Old Charley.

Meanwhile the barking of the dogs and the piteous wailing of some other creature continued to be heard.

When the candles were all lighted, Pepper, who was the bravest of the party, calling on all the others to follow him, led the way into the mouth of the cave.

It was a long, low, winding way, like an interior ravine, but it led him at last into what seemed a large,

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irregular hole or cavern, from whence the barking and the piteous wailing had proceeded.

He entered the cave and waved his candle around to view the interior. What did he see?

First a huddled group against the farthest wall, at which the dogs barked and tore furiously, and from which the most piteous tones of anguish came.

Pepper called off the dogs with peremptory tones; they would not come. They were too much excited to heed him.

Then his blood was up and he rushed upon them, giving them severe kicks in the head and stomach until he sent them howling out of the cave.

At this moment the other three negroes, who had followed him cautiously at some distance behind, entered the cavern with their candles.

Pepper was stooping down over that huddled group to see of what it was composed.

The three more lighted candles now showed everything in the cave; but the group huddled against the rocky wall seemed to concentrate the attention and interest of the visitors.

"Wot is it, Mr. Pepper?" inquired the three negroes in a breath, as they stood looking on.

"I don't know! Come an' see! Somethink alibe underneaf all dese carpets an' t'ings, I beliebe."

He might well say there was something alive there! There was something alive and suffering there, to judge by the pathetic moans that still issued from the rugs and shawls that covered the unknown creature.

The three negroes approached and lowered the candles to view the mystery, scarcely yet daring to uncover it.

Old Charley was the first to speak.

"Dar!" he exclaimed, in unbounded amazement. "Yes

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may take my wool right offen my po' ole head, an' my head offen my shoulders at dat, ef dis yere ain't my young mist'ess' own Ingy rubber camelly shawl, wot cost tousan's ob dollars, an' was her mudder's 'fo' her an' her gran'mudder's 'fo' her! 'Deed it's de trufe!"

"Yes, it is so! I know de shawl! I's seen it a many a time. It's a hairy loom in de famberly ob Orkneys," added Pepper, as he took hold of the garment in question and pulled it vigorously.

Some desperate but weak resistance held it fast for a little while. But at length Pepper pulled it up from the ground of the cave, rolling out of it and uncovering a strange, black creature, who held a large gray cat clasped to its breast.

"O! Oh, Lor'! Oh! Oh, Lor'! It's de debbil! It's de debbil wot cotched me dat ar drefful night at Cave Crik Crossing!" yelled Old Charley, as he turned and fled precipitately from the cavern.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WONDER OF THE WOODS

And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew.
—Goldsmith.

The other three negroes, Peter, Sam, and Pepper, left in the cave after the ignominious flight of Old Charley, experienced more curiosity than fear as they cautiously approached the gibbering creature that lay crouching against the rugged wall, and clasping the gray cat to its breast.

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But how to describe this being, which seemed to belong to neither earth, air nor water—to be neither quite human, nor altogether brute!

It might be human, and of any age from twelve to a hundred.

Its head was enormous, or seemed so from the superabundant growth of long, thick, woolly black hair, that stood out in twisted elf locks all around its head, looking really something like the

"Quills upon the fretful porcupine."

Its face was small and black, and lighted up by a pair of great, prominent eyes, that were now rolling about with startling effect. Its body was slight, black, and nude to the waist, around which was tied a tattered red skirt, from beneath which its naked black feet protruded and lay on the ground.

A large quantity of rags, as of old bits of carpet, shawls or petticoats, lay scattered all around, as if they had been torn off her by the fury of the dogs.

"Dat gray cat's de same warmint wot de dogs chased up de tree, an' wot we dem 'stook for a 'coon; but wot on de yeth is de t'other fing?" inquired Peter.

"W'y, don't yer see? It am a baboon. Didn't we see one once, dat time w'en de sarcus showed at Lo' Umb'a?" replied Sam.

"G'way f'om yere, Sam Ruggles. Dis yere ain't no baboon. Baboons, nor likewise apes, nor monkeys, neber hab no smoove brack skins 'out hair on 'um. Dis yere ain't got no hair, 'cept 'tis on its head. Got plenty dar," said Pepper.

"Lor'! wot am it, den, Mr. Pepper?" inquired Peter.

"It am a human chile. A 'formed idiwut ob a human

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chile, mebby, but a human chile all de same. Yere! hol' my candle, an' wait 'til I speak to it," said Pepper, handing his light to Peter, and then kneeling down on the ground before the poor little monster, who still crouched against the wall, clasping the cat close to its breast, and whimpering dolefully.

"Doan be feared ob me, honey. I wouldn' hurt yer fo' all the worl'. I's yer ole Uncle Pepper, honey," said the man, in the ineffably soft and caressing tones which his race can use on occasion.

Soothed by this voice, the creature stopped whimpering, and looked up in the face of its new friend, with its great black orbs full of tears.

"Who's yer mammy, honey?" inquired Pepper, while Sam and Peter looked and listened with the deepest interest and curiosity.

"Boo-oo-oom!" wailed the child, evidently using the monosyllable as a word.

"Which?" inquired Pepper, turning his head on one side to listen.

"Boo-oo-oom!" repeated the child, still in a tone of distress.

"Nebber heard ob no sich. Did you, ge'men?" inquired Pepper, appealing to his two companions.

They shook their heads in silent denial.

"W'ere does yer lib, honey? Doan be feared to tell yer Uncle Pepper. He won't hurt yer. W'ere dos yer lib?" inquird the man, in a persuasive tone.

"Boo-oo-oom!" whimpered the creature, raising big, black, tearful eyes to the face of its friend.

"W'ere did yer say?"

"Boo-oo-oo-oom!"

"It's an idiwut, ge'men. I frought it was, an' now I know it," said Pepper.

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"Yes; it's an idiwut, sure's you're born," assented Peter.

"'Tis dat," added Sam. "But w'ar did it come f'om? An' who's its frien's?"

"Dunno w'ar it come f'om, an' dunno who's its friends. Doan look like it's got any. But I knows one fing. We can't leabe it yere to perish. We got to get it out'n dis yere some'ow, an' carr' it to Hall-a-Humber plantation. I know as Miss Orkney, my 'nevolent young mist'ess, will 'prove ob de measure. Wot does yer fink, ge'men?"

"Sartainly, sar! sartainly!" chimed in both of his companions.

"Honey, chile, will yer come home long o' yer own ole uncle an' be took good care on?" inquired Pepper, in a cooing tone, as he held out his hands to the strange creature.

Whether it understood his words is doubtful; but that it appreciated his tone and gesture is certain, for it held up its thin, black, shapely arms, and murmured an inarticulate consent.

"Kin yer stand up an' walk? Le's see, now!" said Pepper, as he took hold of the creature's hands, whose fingers were provided with long, clawlike nails, and raised it to its feet—where it stood for an instant—a perfectly symmetrical form, notwithstanding the mop of wool that deformed the head and the talons that disfigured the hands.

"Well, it mebby an idiwut; but it ain't a 'formed idiwut! I nebber seed a more straiterer creetur," remarked Sam.

But he had no sooner spoken than the unknown tottered, and must have fallen had not Pepper promptly thrown his arms around it and held it up.

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"Oh! golly! golly! golly! Mr. Pepper, look! It's hurted bad! It's bleedin' awful!" cried Peter, with all a negro's horror of blood.

"Spread—spread dem ar bits of carpet down on de groun', a' lemmy lay it dere, an' see wot I kin do for it!' exclaimed Pepper, as soon as he perceived how badly hurt his charge really was.

Quick hands spread the carpet.

Pepper laid the fainting form on them and kneeled down to examine its wounds.

Peter and Sam kneeled down to look on.

"Is it hurted berry bad?" inquired Sam, with interest.

"Look a dar!" answered Pepper, pointing to a ragged gash in the calf of the victim's leg, a wound evidently torn by the teeth of one of the dogs.

The negroes uttered a cry of horror.

"It's swoonded now f'om de loss ob blood! An' ef we doan' stop dis yere bleedin', it'll die!" exclaimed Pepper, as he whipped off his own cravat for a bandage.

"Now you, Sam, hole up his foot high, w'ile I ties dis hank'cher tight round de leg 'bove de knee! Debbil fetch dem fool dogs! Dey did it!" he continued, as he went about his rude surgery.

"Yere's my hank'cher, Mr. Pepper!" said Sam.

"An' yere's mine, Mr. Pepper!" added Peter.

"Dat's right! I want 'em all!" exclaimed the amateur srrgeon, as he continued to stanch and bind the wound. "An' now, one of you ge'men please you go out an' see if you can see Mr. Cornwallop anywhar. He's got de w'isky f'ask! Fetch it yere!"

Both the "ge'men" started on this quest, and soon returned with the flask, reporting they had found "Mr. Cornwallop 'mos' dead wid de scare sittin' outside de

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cave, wid de two dogs' heads on his knees, an' de dogs—debbil fetch um!—war 'sleep, an' dat de day was breakin'."

"Dat's good news, anyways," said Pepper, as he took the flask of whisky and dropped a few drops into the mouth of the fainting creature, who half strangled as it swallowed the unfamiliar, fiery liquid, which, however, almost instantly restored it.

It opened its great owllike eyes and looked up at its new protector.

"Yer feels better now, honey, don't yer? Yer'll come home long ob yer own dear old uncle, won't yer?"

Again the creature held up its arms and moaned assent, though it might not have known exactly to what it assented.

"Now, I wunder if I kin tote it? Yes, indeed; it's as light as a feader 'pared to its size!" said Pepper, as he lifted the slight black form in his strong arms and laid its head over his left shoulder and passed its arms around his neck.

But the back and limbs of the creature were naked, and the air was cold.

"Put dat dar Injy rubber camelly shawl ober it, an' tuck it in good," said Pepper to his two companions.

But just then the creature lifted its great, bushy head, looked wildly around the cave, and seeing the gray cat crouching in the corner to which it had fled as soon as it had been released, stretched out both hands with a yearning look.

"Yes, honey, yer shall have yer cat. So yer shall. Mr. Ruggles, please yer catch dat gray cat, an' fetch it yere; for I reckons it is 'mos' de onliest frien' as dis po' creetur's got in dis worl', an' dey mustn't be parted," said Pepper.

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So Sam caught the cat, and Peter wrapped the shawl around Pepper's strange charge, and the three negroes left the cave by the long and winding passage through which they had entered it.

"Ef it ain't broad daylight yer may take my hat!" exclaimed Peter, as they went out to meet the lovely flush of the eastern horizon, that heralded the rising sun.

"Po' pussy—po' pussy! Dar, dar, dar!" said Sam, trying to quiet the gray cat that was very much disquieted in his arms.

"W'ere's my gun an' Mr. Cornwallop's lantin an' w'isky f'ask?" uneasily inquired Pepper.

"Yere dey is, sar. Safe in my keepin'," answered Peter.

"All right, den. Lor', ef dere ain't Mr. Cornwallop lyin' down for dead, at de foot ob dat tree wot de cat run up, an' de dogs barked at. An' dere's de dogs a lyin' dere by him!" exclaimed Sam, whose cat began to bristle and swell to double her size at sight of her enemies.

"Hallo, ole ge'man! Wot's de matter long o' you?" inquired Pepper, approaching the frightened old negro.

"Lor's, chillun, has yer all got out alibe?" muttered Old Charley, in a faltering tone.

"'Libe? Yes. Wot was to hurt us?"

"De debbil, chillun! It was de debbil, sartin sure! Wot-wot-wot dat yer got dere, Mr. Pepper?" inquired Charley, glancing uneasily at Pepper's burden.

"It's nuffin but a po' idiwut wot yer took for de debbil! A po', harmless idiwut, badly hurted, too, by dem consarned dogs!" replied Pepper.

"Is it now, sho nuff?" inquired Old Charley, lifting himself on his elbow to look.

"Yes, it is!"

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"W'ar did it come f'om? I nebber heerd tell o' no idiwuts 'bout yere!"

"Dunno w'ere it come f'om; it can't talk to gib no explanation! But I know w'ere it's a gwine to! It's a gwine to Hall-a-Humber plantation, to my young mist'ess. She'll see to its bein' tuk care ob."

"Well, de Lor'!" exclaimed Old Charley, now rising to his feet.

"Come, old man, the sun's up! Be yer gwine home 'long ob us, or be yer gwine to stay yere all day?" inquired Pepper.

"W'y, in course I's gwine home 'long ob you," replied Old Charley, now on his feet and ready for a start.

They crossed the open space and entered upon the shaded road by which they had come—the bed of a dry brook, a tributary in wet weather to Cave Creek, and shady even on this November morning, from the overhanging and mingling of the branches of forest trees that grew on either side, and which had not even now lost half their foliage.

Devil's Gully certainly did not deserve its name, by daylight, at least, for a more beautiful woodland walk could hardly be conceived, strewn as it was with forest leaves, hedged and canopied with forest foliage, through whose branches overhead the golden sun filtered and glanced.

"Lemmy 'liebe yer ob yer load fur a little w'ile, Mr. Pepper," said Peter, after they had walked a mile on their way.

"No, I t'ank you, Mr. Prevost! Not now! P'esently, 'haps I shall be glad to 'vail myse'f ob yer politeness," replied Pepper.

But when they had trudged on another mile Pepper

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found his strength giving way beneath his burden, and willingly accepted Peter's offer.

"Dar—dar—doan yer be feared, honey! We's all frien's yere! Nobody gwine hurt yer yere! Go to yer Uncle Peter an' let him tote yer a little way. Den yer old Uncle Pepper'll take yer up ag'in," said the man, as he resigned the creature to Peter."

And they trudged on, followed by the dogs, until they reached the point where the brook joined the creek.

"An' yere is jes w'ere we tuk de wrong turn an' los' our way," said Sam. "Ef we'd kep' up de crick, we'd a-got ebber so many 'coon."

"Yes; but we wouldnt a-sabed dis po' idiwut's life!" added Pepper.

"I fink, Mr. Prevost, it be my turn to carry that po' creetur now," said Sam.

"Not yet, Mr. Ruggles. I kin tote it a little longer," replied Peter.

And they walked on until they came to the Cave Creek Crossing.

"Yere's w'ere dat dere creetur leap' from de tree on to de horse's back an' scare me mos' to deff!" said Uncle Charley, pointing to the oak that was half strangled by the great grapevine.

"Now, Mr. Ruggles, ef yer would 'bleege me wid a lif' I'd be frankful to yer!" said Peter, who had begun to stagger under his load.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE HUT IN THE WOODS

A sylvan lodge amid the wild.—ANON.

BUT just then the hasty rattle of wheels was heard along the Umbra road, and one of the farm hands came along driving an empty cart.

"Hello, Jess! w'ere yer gwine?" inquired Pepper.

"Lor', Mr. Pepper, is dat you? Why, I is gwine home, in course! I jest been to haul a load o' wood inter de willage, an' now I'se gwine back wid de empty cart," replied the boy, as he stopped his team.

"All right! Can't yer gib us a lif'? We dem's been tramped all de way f'om de rise ob de Debbil's Gully. Fax is, we's been trampin' de whole blessed night an' ain't treed a single 'coon!"

"Lor's, now!" exclaimed the boy, opening his eyes.

"But 'stead ob killin' 'coons I fink we's done somefin' better! We's saved de life ob a po', stray idiwut. Dar it is in Mr. Prevost's arms!" continued Pepper, pointing to Peter, who had seated himself on the roadside to rest, with his burden laid across his knees.

"Lors, now!" exclaimed Jess, staring at the group.

"Kin yer gib us a lif' back home?" continued Pepper.

"Sartin sure, sar! Git in, ge'men; all on yer!" cordially responded the boy.

Old Charley immediately availed himself of the privilege, and climbed into the cart, taking the gray cat from Sam with him.

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But Sam and Peter spoke together for a moment, and then Sam said:

"I fink, Mr. Cornwallop and Mr. Pepper, as me an' Mr. Prevost will hab to take leabe ob yer yere! Ef we could be ob any sarvice in helpin' yer to carry dat po' creetur, we would be proud to 'company yer; but long as yer's fell in long o' de empty cart, we fink yer don't 'quire ob our 'sistance, an' we better turn 'roun' yere, w'ere our roads part, an' go home, w'ere we is 'spected, yer know."

"Berry well, ge'men! Berry well! Jes' as you say. I fanks yer berry much for yer company so far, an' I hopes to enj'y it ag'in," said Uncle Charley politely.

"An' I fank yer for yer 'sistance wid dis po', helpless creetur," added Pepper, as he lifted the nondescript from the knees of Peter and laid it carefully in the cart.

"An' mine, ge'men, yer's all 'vited an' jew at Welcumin' nex' Wen'sy night for anoder 'coon hunt, w'en I hopes as we'll hab better luck!" said Peter, as he and his companion, Sam, took the road to the ferry.

Pepper climbed into the cart, drew the slight form of the sleeping or unconscious creature carefully on his knees, and supported it tenderly as the cart drove off toward Hall-in-Umbra.

"I fink," said Pepper, "we'd better take it to Aunt Jenny an' Aunt Judy's hut. It is a mile nearer dan de hall, an' 'sides w'ich Hera's dar, an' she'll know what to do wid it. An' den we kin go on an' tell de w'ite people. Wot do you fink, Mr. Cornwallop?"

"I fink it am a judy-wicious plan," answered Uncle Charley.

So they drove on until they came within about a mile of the hall, and then stopped the cart at the entrance of

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a very narrow and almost invisible path branching off from the right hand of the road.

Here Pepper got out and carefully lifted out his burden, and laying it tenderly over his breast and shoulder, entered the covered path.

The cat jumped out of the cart and followed its friend.

Jess and Old Charley drove off toward the hall, followed by the dogs.

Pepper walked for a few hundred yards and then reached a very small clearing, in the midst of which stood a long hut completely overgrown with moss and lichen, and suggesting the idea of a very large bird's nest. It was surrounded by a small garden.

Pepper pushed open the door with his foot and entered unceremoniously, bearing his burden in his arms and jealously followed by the cat.

The two centenarian negro women sat over their pine-knot fire, on opposite corners of the chimney.

"Lor'! wot hev yer got dere, boy?" inquired Aunt Judy, to whom every man and woman now seemed boy and girl.

"A po', 'flicted creetur, wot de dogs hurt bad, an' w'ich I wants you to 'tend to fur me. I know as dere ain't no sech doctors as you an' Aunt Jenny on de face ob dis yeth," said Pepper.

"No, chile! likely not, indeed. Who is it yer fetch yere? W'ere did yer fine it?" inquired Aunt Jenny, leaving her seat to look at the stranger.

"I 'spects it is an idiwut wot has strayed away from its friends and got lost. It can't gib no 'count ob itse'f! De dogs found it w'ile we was out 'coon huntin' las' night, an' hurted it bad. Debbil fetch um!"

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"Po' t'ing! Dere! lay it on de bed, boy, an me an' Jenny'll 'ten' to it."

"Whey's Hera?" inquired Pepper, as he carefully laid his burden out on the clean bed, upon which the cat jealously jumped to lie down beside its friend.

"Gone to de spring to fetch a pail ob water," replied the aged woman, as she began to examine her patient.

"It ain't got any pulse, hardly! It hab lost a great deal of blood. I's feared it is dyin'," she said, holding the little black wrist and counting its beats.

"Ah, me! Well, mebbe it is bes' fo' a po', frien'less, 'flicted fing like dat to go home!"

"I is pow'ful sorry it wur our dogs—drot um!—as killed it, dough! An' it to die in 'fense ob its po' cat! Dere's de cat now!"

"Boy, go to dat dere corner cupboard an' fetch me dat little wial ob brandy wot my young mist'ess gib me. I pour some down its t'roat," said Aunt Judy.

Pepper went and brought the little bottle.

Aunt Judy unstopped it, put it to the poor creature's lips, and poured the brandy slowly, drop by drop, into its mouth.

As before, the frail creature strangled for an instant, recovered itself, and opened its great owllike eyes.

At that moment Hera came in with the pail of water, set it on its stand, covered it with its movable top, and then went toward the bed, asking carelessly:

"Wot dat you got dere?"

"A po' fing dat de boy Pepper foun' in de Big Woods an' fetch yere! It's been hurted. I's feared as it's dyin', too," said Aunt Judy, as she made way for Hera to approach the bed.

The woman came, full of idle curiosity, and looked upon the unknown sufferer—

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Looked—threw her hands up and clasped her head, like one going crazy—looked again, long and wildly—then she shrieked out: "It's my chile! my little gal! Oh, Meenie! Meenie! Meenie!"

The sinking child opened its eyes, gazed into the face bent above it, and gasped, as if laboring to speak.

"Meenie! Oh, Meenie! Meenie! Don't die! Don't die! Don't die now I've foun' yer!" cried the mother, wringing her hands in anguish as she gazed upon the child, whose owllike eyes met hers with an unwavering stare, while its lips moved and trembled as if trying to speak.

"Oh, Meenie! Little Meenie! I'm yer mammie! yer po', sinful, sorrowful mammie! Doan yer know me? Doan yer know yer po' mammie?" wailed the erring and heart-broken woman.

But no answer came from the fixed eyes and trembling lips.

"Oh, if de Lor' would only spare my little chile, I nebber would sin no mo'! nebber no mo'! Oh, Meenie! doan die! doan die! Stay 'long o' yer po' mammie!"

The little face was convulsed for a moment. The great eyes were fixed on those of the weeping woman with a gleam of recollection. She convulsed with one word:

"Mammie!"

And then the eyes closed and the breath ceased.

"She's gone, honey! She's gone, Hera! Doan take on arter her, honey! She's better off!" said old Judy, in well meant commonplaces, while the wails of the mother resounded through the hut.

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CHAPTER XXIV

INVESTIGATION

GREAT was the astonishment of Ora upon hearing the news of the capture.

It came in this way:

That morning the family party were assembled at breakfast in the oak parlor of Hall-in-Umbra.

Betsy, the housemaid, was waiting on the table.

"Where is Uncle Charley? Has he not returned from his 'coon hunt, or is he so tired that he has gone to bed?" inquired Miss Orkney of the colored girl.

"Please, miss, none ob um ain't come home yet," replied Betsy.

"They are taking their time, I think," laughed Ora.

Half an hour later, when breakfast was nearly through, and while the company were lingering over the table, as idle people will over a pleasant meal, Betsy came in from the kitchen and said:

"If yer please, miss, Uncle Charley hab come, an' 'quests de p'iviledge ob speakin' to yer, habbin' a 'portant 'munication to make."

"Oh, let him come in! I suppose his important communication is nothing more nor less than an attempt at justification of his long absence," replied Ora.

The girl went out with the message, and a few minutes later Old Charley entered the breakfast room and stood bowing just within the door.

"I am glad to see you safe back, Uncle Charley," said Ora.

"T'anky, honey, young mist'ess; so am I!" replied the old man, a little inconsequentially.

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"You have something to say to me, I think," continued Ora.

"Yes, mist'ess! Yes, honey! We's done cotch it!"

"Caught what, Uncle Charley?"

"De—de—de—wot-yer-call-um, honey! De wot-yer-call-um, wid de porkypine head an' de owl eyes! Dat fing wot 'peared to me at Cave Crik Crossin', an'—an'—an' milk de cow 'fo' day in de mornin'!"

"You—you—— Do you mean to say that you have caught the 'What-is-it'?" inquired Ora, gazing fixedly into the solemnly important-looking face of the old man.

"Yes, mist'ess; sure's yer born, we's cotch dat same debbil's imp."

"Where did you find it? How did you catch it? What have you done with it?" demanded Ora, with eager curiosity, while all her party looked and listened with suspended breath.

"De dogs did it, honey, up at de furder end ob de Debbil's Gully! An' I 'spects as dey has hurted it bad. I 'spects, fax is, dey has 'bout killed it!"

"Oh! What sort of a creature is it? Can't you tell me that, Uncle Charley?"

"'Deed I couldn't, if it wur to sabe my life, young mist'ess. It's got black arms an' legs, dough, like a human, an' a head like a porkypine, an' eyes like a owl. An' it's hurted to deff, I fink."

"What have you done with it?" demanded Ora, rising from her seat at the table.

"Uncle Pepper, he mighty sorry fo' it, 'cause it was hurted 'fendin' ob its cat, wot de dogs chased. He tote it all de way to Aunt Judy an' Aunt Jenny's hut in de woods dar. He 'lows how it am a po', 'flicted chile—he do!"

"A child! Good Heaven! And hunted down and

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half killed by the dogs! I must go and see to this at once! I suppose Uncle Charley is too tired, after being out all night, to do anything. And, Betsy, go and tell Nelie to give you my case, and plenty of lint and bandages; and get yourself ready to attend me," said Ora, who, as a part of her practical education at the convent, had acquired that skill in minor surgery which is so useful, and even necessary, in the head of a remote country family.

When she had hurried upstairs to prepare for her drive, and Conrad had hastened to the stables to hurry around the chaise, the two old ladies left at the table began to question Old Charley, much to his disgust, for he wanted to go to his breakfast, and then to his bed; but as they could get but little out of him beyond what he had told Ora, they soon released him and let him go.

At the same moment Ora came downstairs dressed for her drive, followed by Betsy, bearing a little mahogany case and a large bundle of linen; and Conrad Orkney drove up in the pony chaise.

"You will please excuse me, aunties, both; I will return as soon as I can," said the young lady, as she opened the door and hurried out, still closely followed by Betsy, to take her seat in the chaise.

When mistress and maid were both in their places, Conrad drove off.

The forest hut was but a mile from the hall, and in about ten minutes they reached that point in the road from which the almost invisible footpath led to the little dwelling.

Here they got out of the chaise, entered the footpath, and soon reached the hut.

Already a large crowd of negroes—men, women, and children from the plantation quarters—surrounded the

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house, anxious to enter and see this wonder of the woods, and were only kept at bay by Pepper, who stood in the door with his gun in his hand, exhorting and threatening:

"Yo' keep 'way f'om yere, yo' disord'ly darkies! Yer got no mo' manners nor wild Injuns! Yer come makin' a 'sturbance 'roun' de sollum house ob deff I shoot right in 'mong yer! 'Deed, 'fo' de Marster, I will! I won't kill none o' yer, but I'll pepper yer so good as yer smart fo' a week! Yer hears me, doan yer? Oh, young marster an' mist'ess!" he said, on perceiving the approach of the young pair. "'Deed I glad yer's come to reg'late dese rips! De po' little fing is gone, young mist'ess. 'Deed she is! Nuff to break one's heart to see her. 'Deed it is! An' she killed 'fendin' ob her po' little pet cat f'om de dogs, too!"

"Dead, Pepper?" inquired Ora, in a compassionate tone.

"Oh, yes, mist'ess! She died jes' 'bout ten minutes ago," sighed the man, dashing a tear from his eye with one rough hand.

"Let me pass; I wish to go in and see her," said the young lady.

"And all you people go away at once. This is no place for you, and you cannot be permitted to crowd here. Go!" commanded Conrad Orkney, in a peremptory tone that at once dispersed the reluctant negroes.

As he followed Ora into the hut, a voice of wailing was heard, and poor Hera was seen sitting on the foot of the bed where her child lay, rocking her body to and fro, and moaning piteously:

"It's my little gal! It's my little Meenie! She's gone!—gone! Oh! dis is my punishment! for wand'rin' 'way an' leabin' her! De dogs killed her, young

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mist'ess!—killed her 's if she was a wild beast!—killed her when she was 'fendin' her po' little cat f'om dem. Oh, it was cruel! Oh, it was cruel!"

"My poor, dear Hera! My heart bleeds for you!" said Ora, with the tears in her eyes, as she laid her hand on the grieving woman's head, and paused to look at the child.

Aunt Judy and Aunt Jenny, who were standing by the bedside, made way for her.

She bent over the grotesque little black face, with its great, prominent eyes, whose lids were closed now, and its huge brush of woolly, black hair, whose twisted elf locks stood in all directions, and by all these features she recognized the mysterious nocturnal visitor of her bedchamber—though how that visitor got in or out through the locked and bolted doors and windows was still the marvel of marvels.

In deep compassion she gazed upon the little, still, black face, and laid her hand upon its forehead.

Something in the feeling of that forehead caused her to take hold of the thin wrist and try the pulse, and then to slip her hand under the sheet and try the heart.

Then, turning to her auditors, she said:

"The child is not dead. She has only fallen into a swoon."

Hera's head sprang up, and a look of eager, incredulous questioning came into her face, that she raised to Ora, who was now briskly rubbing the hands and arms of the little creature.

"Betsy, unlock my case and bring it here. Pepper, take the pony chaise that you will find at the end of the walk, and drive as fast as you can to Lower Umbra, and fetch Dr. Leicester here," said the young lady, with her usual practical promptitude.

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"Not dead? Did you say, not dead, young mist'ess?" breathed Hera, in the lowest of eager tones, as if she were afraid of extinguishing the hope—the little flickering of hope that she yet scarcely dared to entertain.

"No, indeed; she is not dead, my dear Hera. And with the blessing of the Lord on our endeavors she need not die," heartily responded Ora, who was now busy unlocking her case to get a little vial of spirits of ammonia. Her messenger had already started on his errand for the doctor.

But Ora, meanwhile, used the remedies she had been taught to apply under similar circumstances.

And while the poor, anxious mother looked on, with all her soul in her eager face, they had the happiness of seeing the child open her great dark eyes.

"She will do now! Aunt Judy, is that beef tea ready?" inquired Ora.

"Yes, honey, an' I made it jes as yer tell me!" replied the old woman, lifting a glass bottle of beef essence out of a little pot of boiling water and pouring it through a little strainer into a cup, which she brought to Miss Orkney.

And while Ora fed the child by drops from a small teaspoon, Hera fell on her knees at the foot of the bed to offer up fervent thanks for a restoration which her simple faith believed to be an answer to prayer.

Ora next examined the dressings of the child's wound, and finding that the coagulated blood, nature's own styptic, had stopped the bleeding, she determined to leave it so until the arrival of the doctor. And Ora sat down by the child, who seemed to have dropped into a natural sleep.

It was a patient watch on the part of Ora and a very

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dull one on that of her companions; for she discouraged conversation.

Conrad Orkney stood in the doorway, looking out into the woods and silently waving off any would-be visitor, always an inquisitive negro who might want to come in.

Aunt Judy and Aunt Jenny sat like wooden women on each side of the chimney, with their hands crossed on their laps and their eyes fixed on the floor, as if they had been "to meeting." Hera still knelt at the foot of the bed with her head often bowed in prayer, or, when it was raised, with her eyes fixed in devouring love and anxiety upon her recovered child.

No one moved in the hut except Ora, and she, only when the child stirred, silently administered a few teaspoonfuls of beef juice into which she had put a few drops of brandy.

In less than an hour Pepper returned with Dr. Leicester, who explained his unexpectedly quick arrival by saying that Colonel Colville's man, Sam, had come to his office early that morning and told him of the accident and he had already started and was on his way to the hall when he met Pepper coming after him.

"That was very thoughtful of Sam," said Ora, approvingly, as she made way for the doctor to come to the bedside.

The child was now awake, and quieter and stronger than she had seemed since her great loss of blood.

After the doctor had made his examination, he pronounced the patient to be going on most favorably under the circumstances, and he spoke with surprise and admiration of Miss Orkney's skill in medicine.

"It was my dear father's wish," Ora explained, "that I should learn as much of the art of nursing as the Sis-

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ters of Mercy could teach me, and you are aware that they are skilful nurses."

The doctor bowed assent.

"What I wish to know is, whether it will be safe to move this child to the hall? I wish to have her under my own eye, or at least within my reach, day and night, until she shall have fully recovered," she said.

"It will be quite safe if the patient is kept in a horizontal position and borne carefully, so that there will be no jar. I will, if you wish, personally direct her transportation."

Ora gratefully accepted the offered assistance, and then leaving the child under the care of the doctor, she left the hut, got into her pony chaise, and beckoned Conrad Orkney, who was standing at a little distance, to come and drive her home, as she wished to have a room prepared on the ground floor for the reception of the little patient.

The young man gladly obeyed her, and they started for the hall.

On alighting before the hall door Ora was assailed by questions from every member of the family.

"Yes; it is the same," Ora answered; "the little creature whose strange apparitions have puzzled us so much now lies wounded and helpless at the hut in the woods. She is the long missing child of Hera."

"The child of Hera!" chimed in Bevvie and the two aunties. "Why, where in the world has she lived all this time?"

"Apparently in the woods; but there is much as yet unknown, that we may learn hereafter. And now let me pass, please, dears; for I must have a room down here prepared for the poor, wounded bird," said Ora, as

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she went to the rear of the house and called her women servants together, to set them at the work.

Soon a little empty chamber in the back building was made comfortable by a clean cot fitted with a soft mattress and fresh sheets and blankets; white dimity curtains put up at the windows; rugs laid down beside the bed and before the hearth, and a stand and a couple of chairs brought in, and a bright wood fire kindled in the open chimney.

By the time the room was ready the little patient arrived, borne on a narrow mattress by two men, who held its corners at the head and foot, and attended by Dr. Leicester, jealously followed by the cat and a squad of idlers, whom Conrad Orkney soon sent about their business.

The child's appearance was much improved since Ora had seen her last. Her frightful hair was cut off short and brushed until it was crimped up into short crisp curls all over her head; her long nails had been trimmed, and she had been carefully washed and slipped into clean clothes, borrowed from Aunt Jenny and Aunt Judy, and not much too large for her, either, since age had bowed and shriveled the two old centenarians into almost childish proportions.

And when this waif of the wilderness was laid between the fresh and fragrant sheets on that easy cot bed in the cheerful room, with the gray cat coiled up beside her, she smiled with delight, and taking Ora's hand in her own, began to show her gratitude by licking it.

"After all, the poor thing is more like a dumb beast than a human being," said Miss Constantia Orkney, who had come with Mrs. Mossop and Bevvie into the room.

"She has lived with dumb beasts for the last few years, I imagine," replied Ora.

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"I wonder how she has lived, and why she has not perished with cold and hunger in the wilderness," said Mrs. Mossop.

"And how she ever got in and out through fastened doors and windows when she came to frighten us out of our senses in the night," said Bevvie.

"I don't know. There is much to be learned yet of this poor little creature's history, though I am not sure that we shall ever learn it," observed Ora.

"And now, my dear Miss Orkney," said Dr. Leicester, appealing to the young lady of the house, "I think that this child had better be left here for the present in the care of her mother. She should go to sleep."

"Certainly. Come, aunties, dinner is going on the table," said Ora, acting promptly on the suggestion. "And, doctor, I hope you will join us," she added, rising.

The doctor bowed and smiled assent, and then Ora led her company to the oak parlor, whence they were soon rung into dinner.

The doctor saw his patient again in the afternoon, and then took leave, promising to return the next day to dress the wound, which he had not thought well to disturb after its first rough dressing by old Pepper and Mother Nature.

Toward evening the two ancient women, Aunt Judy and Aunt Jenny, came to the hall and asked to see Miss Orkney.

Ora went into the dining room and sent for them to come in to her.

"I suppose you wished to hear how the wounded girl is getting on. I am happy to tell you that she is doing very well. She is fast asleep, with her pet cat in her arms and her mother sitting by her," said Ora, as soon as she saw the two bent old figures coming in, each

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leaning on a stick and one with a bundle over her shoulder.

"T'ank de Lord," said Aunt Judy, "but it wasn't altogether 'bout de chile we come to 'quire, honey; but to fetch home dis yere. Put down dat bundle, 'oman!"

Aunt Jenny placed the bundle on the dining room table.

"Sit down, both of you! Sit down at once! And then you may tell me what is in that bundle," said Ora, in a peremptory tone that the two poor old creatures at once obeyed by slowly letting themselves down, with moans, upon the nearest chairs, for their aged limbs were very stiff.

"Now what have you brought to me in that bundle?" inquired Ora.

"Yer shawl, honey. Yer great, walable shawl wot's been in de fambly eber since I can 'member, an dat ain't far f'om a hunder years, yer know," answered Aunt Judy.

"My shawl!" exclaimed Ora.

"Yes, honey! de shawl wot come f'om de Injy country an' cost such mints ob money. It come wrap' round de chile, honey. Soon's eber I see dat shawl I knowed it. An' w'en dey laid dat chile down in my bed I sez nuffin to nobody, but jes' takes dat shawl an' foles it up an' pits it in my chist to gib to you wid my own han's."

"Well! I am surprised, and yet I ought not to be. But, my poor Aunt Judy, why did you not give it to me when I was at the hut? It would have saved you this walk," said Ora.

"Dat's it, honey! Dat's jes' it. In de bustle dere was w'en de chile seem' to die, I forgot all 'bout de shawl. An' w'en yer come an' foun' out as de little one had only fainted, in de 'citement dat 'sued, I nebber

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'membered to gib yer de shawl. An' I nebber t'ought ob it ag'in till w'en we was goin' to bed I had 'casion to go to my chist an' I lif' up de lid, an' dar! dar was de shawl layin' dar like a rattlesnake ready to sting me for forgettin'. But yer see, honey, my memorandum ain't nuffin like so good as it use' to was."

No, poor soul; I know it isn't. But never mind, Aunt Judy! In the world to which we are all fast hastening, your memory will be better than ever!" said Ora affectionately.

"Hope so, honey! Hope so! Now, 'bout de shawl! I sez to Jenny, we mus' carry it home to the young mist'ess dis night. We can't lay ourselves liable to be 'cuse ob keepin' stolen goods in de house! Not in wenable old ancient ages ob our yethly pilg'imidge, we can't. An' Jenny, she say, 'No, we can't.' An' so we bofe took dis walk an' fetch yer home yer shawl."

"And now you must not walk back, that will be too much for you. You will stay all night. I will make you comfortable."

"Lor', young mist'ess, we couldn't sleep out'n our own bed, 'deed Lor' knows we couldn't! We's berry much 'bleeged to yer, but yer mus' please 'scuse us, young mist'ess!" said Aunt Judy, with such a look of alarm and distress at the proposal that Ora hastened to say:

"Very well; I can quite understand your feeling. Pepper shall drive you home in the pony chaise. And you shall have a glass of milk punch apiece before you go."

And despite the two old women's modest objection, Miss Orkney rang the bell and gave orders that Nelie should mix the milk punch, and Pepper should bring around the pony chaise.

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A little later, when Aunt Judy and Aunt Jenny sat sipping their rich beverage, the former gave expression to her satisfaction by saying:

"Oh, Jenny, chile, we dem ain't been so holped up, nobber in our libes afo'. To d'ink dis 'licious stuff, an' den presently to ride home in a carriage."

"It's hebbenly!" exclaimed Aunt Jenny.

When they had finished their punch, they took a most affectionate leave of their young mistress, and followed Nelie, who led them carefully out to where the pony chaise awaited them.

Left alone, Ora unrolled and carefully examined her India shawl. With the exception of a few spots of blood on the mignonette fringe, which could be easily sponged out, the valuable heirloom was not injured in the least.

She took it to the oak parlor, where her visitors were sitting, and showed it them in triumph.

When all had examined the shawl, and seen for themselves that it was the veritable heirloom, and had congratulated Ora on its recovery, Mrs. Mossop added:

"Yes! And I do suppose if that cave could be searched, many a missing thing would be found, and a many a mystery cleared up!"

"The cave shall be searched to-morrow. I shall take Pepper for a guide, and go on that expedition in person," said Conrad Orkney.

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CHAPTER XXV

COME TO LIGHT

God's world is full of beauty;
  God's world is steeped in light;
It is the self-same glory
  That makes the day so bright,
Which thrills the earth with music,
  Or lights the stars at night.
Hid in earth's mines of silver,
  Floating on clouds above,
Ringing in autumn's tempest,
  Murmur'd by every dove,
One thought fills God's creation—
  His own great name of Love!

—ANONYMOUS.

THE next morning the weather was clear, bright, and warm, with the haze of the Indian summer hanging over river, forest and mountain, like gold dust touched by sunlight.

"A fine day for our expedition, Ora," said Conrad Orkney, as he sprang into his saddle to start on a journey of discovery to the Caves of Umbra.

"A very fine day, Conrad. What time do you think you will be back?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Oh, by nightfall, at the latest! But do not wait supper for me."

"At least I will not keep our aunties waiting. We can take our supper *tête-à-tête,* as we did a few evenings ago—if you should not return in time for the family tea."

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"Quite so. Then I need not hurry," said the young man.

"Pepper, have you the luncheon basket?" inquired Miss Orkney of the old negro, who, mounted on a groom's horse, was prepared to attend his master in the character of a guide to the caves.

"Oh, yes, miss!" replied the man, holding up to view a large basket that he had hung on the horn of his saddle, on the other side.

"Ah! very well!"

"Good morning, Ora!" exclaimed Conrad, touching his hat as he rode off.

"Good luck to you!" called the young girl after him, before she turned into the house to rejoin her guests.

She found them seated around the wood fire, in the old oak parlor.

"Now, I wonder what Conrad Orkney does expect to find in those wet, slimy caves?" said Miss Constantia. "If he gets nothing else, he will get the rheumatism."

"Yes, he'll get the rheu-rheu-rheu-rheumatism," chimed in Mrs. Mossop.

"He expects to find much missing property, which, like my India shawl, may have been carried off there. Do you not know, aunties, that there have been a great many mysterious thefts in this neighborhood, for which the poor negroes have borne the blame, and which are now likely to be traced to this irresponsible little magpie?" suggested Ora.

"Um—well! I hope he may find the missing property, and not get the rheumatism," replied Miss Constantia.

"I hope and trust he may find my malachite box, with the pearl, ruby and coral sets in it," said Bevvie.

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"Why, did you lose three sets, Belvidera?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Yes; and I value them because Ora gave them to me."

"Well, I hope you will get them, my dear," said Miss Countie.

Meanwhile, Conrad Orkney, attended by his faithful "squire," Pepper, rode through the woods of Umbra on his new adventure.

The deep, rich, somber beauty of the woods and the golden glory of the Indian summer sky rendered the ride so delightful that the young man was tempted to linger on it and slacken his horse's gait to a walk.

Pepper did not share in these artistic and poetic moods.

"Better spur up dat lazy beast o' yourn, young marse," he said. "Tell yer wot, it's a long ways we has to go and come back, an' de days is gettin' short," he added.

Mr. Orkney laughed and kept on in the deliberate pace that he and his horse liked best.

In due time they reached Cave Creek Crossing.

"Now, young marse, we has got to turn to de right, an' folly de coorse ob de crik up to de p'int w'ere it is j'ined by de gully. An' a good fing it is as it's dry wedder, 'cause dere ain't no road, nor likewise paf, but jes' de bed ob de crick! See for yourse'f, young marse, how de trees an' de bushes grow right down de banks ob de crik on bof sides, leabin' hardly a foothol' for a squir'l, much less a man an' hoss," Pepper explained.

"I see!—but the bed of the creek being dry makes not a bad road," replied the young gentleman, as he turned into it.

"Yes; bein' dry, as yer say, young marse; but I tell

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yer, I has seen dis yere crik, arter a long rain, or a hard thunder storm, or eben in de spring arter a heaby fraw —I has seen dis yere like a rushin', rorin', ragin' ribber. 'Deed it's de trufe!" said the old man, as he followed his leader.

"I can well believe you. Indeed, I remember to have seen it turned into a torrent after an equinoctial storm that occurred while I was spending the summer holidays here with my Uncle Orestes, in my childhood."

"W'y I 'members dat!" eagerly exclaimed Pepper. "Yer couldn't been more'n eight or nine years ole, an' Miss Ory was a babby in arms. Oh, don't I 'member it, too? Don't yer 'member how I used to get birds' nesses for yer?"

"Oh, yes! and many other rascalities for which we both ought to have been caned!" laughed the young man.

"An' so us ought, young marse! 'Deed it's de trufe," tittered the negro.

And he commenced a series of reminiscences that served as subjects for conversation until they reached the point where the "Devil's Gully" joined the creek at such an acute angle that it was instantly seen how on a night's journey any traveler might mistake the gully for the creek, as the 'coon hunters had done on the previous night.

"Now, young marse, take de fork on yer right han'! dat's de gully wot we mistuk for de crik! De crik leads up to well beknown huntin' groun's, but de gully leads to dem yere debblish caves an' places, wot we dem nebber eben seen 'fo' t'udder night; an' den by our bein' misled by de ebil one an' de farder ob lies hisse'f! Dis way, young marse. Mine how yer come down, please, sar, 'case de bottom ob dis gully is werry full ob crags an' holes, w'ich I done want no broken necks, nor like-

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wise fun'als on dis 'casion," said old Pepper, as he cautiously led the way down into the depths of the gully, or, more properly, ravine.

They had to go so slowly and carefully that the remainder of their journey was long and silent; and yet that rugged roadway of Nature's own handiwork was so wild and beautiful with its walls of rocks and trees, and its canopy of brilliant variegated foliage, giving glimpses of the deep blue sky above, and flecked with spangles of sunlight to its deepest depths, that Conrad could not regret the leisurely pace at which they were forced to travel.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon before they emerged from the gully into that open space that lay between the thick woods and the base of Mount Umbra.

There were a few straggling trees at great distances apart from each other, like outposts of the great army of the woods they had just left.

And beyond these arose the high and hoary front of Mount Umbra.

"Yere we is, young marse! I fotch yer straight, didn' I?" complacently inquired Pepper, as they drew up to rest their horses.

"Quite straight, in one sense, though very crooked in all others," laughed Mr. Orkney.

"Oh! dat were the gully! I couldn't help de gully turnin' an' twistin' side to side an' up an' down. It is de natur' ob gullies in dese yere parts to do dat dere. I calls it onlawful, but it is. An' I couldn't help ob it myse'f; now could I, young marse?"

"No," said the young gentleman, absently, for he was staring across the open upon the rugged, forbidding, mysterious-looking front of Mount Umbra.

"An' dere, young marse, dere's de werry tree wot dat

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cat run up w'en dem fool dogs chased it! Yes—as if we dem was huntin' cats!"

The young man looked at the tree—a fine oak standing alone in the open space on the right.

"An' dere, right 'cross yander, in de front ob de mountain, is de hole wot de cat run inter w'en we dem fired up de tree, an' she jumped down an' de dogs tuk arter her."

Mr. Orkney's glance followed the direction of Pepper's finger, and saw nothing but a thick growth of evergreens in a deep fissure of the rocks.

"Is that the mouth of the cave?" he inquired.

"Dat's it, marse, sure's yer born! An' nobody nebber would a 'spected it, nor likewise foun' it out, if de fool dogs hadn't treed dat cat, an' we fired inter de tree an' scared it down, so it run inter dat hidden hole wid de dogs arter it, and we arter de dogs."

"And there you found the wild negro child?"

"Yes, young marse, o' course. An' I jes wish yer could a heerd Old Uncle Cha'ley yell, an' seed him run w'en we foun' it! He-he-he!" laughed Pepper.

"And the child was alone!"

"Hi! young marse; yes, all alone, 'cept for de cat. It was a hol'in ob de cat unner de rug an' shawl, an' tryin' to 'fen' it f'om de dogs, an' dey barkin' an' jumpin' an' tearin' wid toof an' claw, till I do 'clare I wunner de chile an' de cat too wasn' tored limb f'om limb! I does so!"

"I fear that must have happened if it had not been for your speedy arrival."

"Jes' so, young marse. We was right onter de heels ob de dogs, w'ich was de reason dey hadn' time to kill dat chile! Why, Lor! I had to take one dog by de t'roat an' choke him mos' to deff 'fo' I could make him leab

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go, an' kick t'oder till I t'ought I'd killed him! Oh! I tell yer, 'twas a narrer 'scape!"

"Well, we had better go on," said Mr. Orkney.

"Yes, marse; but we can't ride de horses inter dat cabe. We will hab to tie 'em to dis tree, I fink," said Pepper, as he dismounted and led his steed toward the oak tree without waiting orders from his superior; but, then, Pepper considered himself the guide of the expedition, and his chief tacitly recognized his claims to that position by following his lead.

When they had tied their horses, and lighted up two glass lanterns, they walked across to the foot of the mountain, found the mouth of the cave, and pushing aside the scrub pine and cedar bushes that hid and obstructed the passage, they entered the narrow, crooked way that led to the larger apartment, which they soon reached.

Seen by the light of the two lanterns this cavern was not the "damp and slimy" place feared for its rheumatic tendencies by Miss Orkney.

It seemed perfectly dry.

It looked like the inside of a rough cupola, or dome, of about one hundred feet in circumference, and thirty in height, at the center of the top; the rounded walls were very rugged; the floor nearly flat, but rough and uneven, with a litter of miscellaneous articles scattered all around it.

"De Lor's!" exclaimed Pepper, who had immediately begun to rummage among the old blankets, rugs, shawls, and so forth. "If yere ain't Miss Bevvie's green malaky box! I know it, 'cause I used to see it w'en she had it at Owlwood! An' yere's Miss Ory's yugs! Well, I 'clar to goodness! An' yere's Nelie's red flannel petticoat wot she 'cuse city Rachel o' takin'! Yere's a plaid

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shawl as I dunno who it 'longs to! An' yere's Uncle Cha'ley Cornwallop's red 'nana han'kercher, an' yere's——"

"Hand me that malachite casket, Pepper. Never mind the other things," said Mr. Orkney.

"Yer mean dis green box, young marse?"

"Yes."

"Yere it is, marse! It's been broke open, yer see, an' dere ain't nuffin' left inter it! I calls it onlawful! I does, indeed, even if de chile was an idiwut an' not 'sponsible for wot she did. I calls it onlawful to steal green malaky boxes an' break 'em open! I does, indeed! I calls it onlawful!" said Pepper, as he surrendered the box.

Mr. Orkney examined the recovered casket. Yes; the lock had been rudely forced, probably by having the blade of a knife or some thin-edged instrument pushed between the top and the bottom of the box, which had been rifled of all its contents.

"See if you can find any jewelry on the ground, Pepper," said the young man.

"W'ich, young marse?"

"Jewelry, trinkets, you know!"

"Yer mean beads an' goole an' yere bobs, an' sech?"

"Yes."

"I'll look, marse."

And Pepper went down on his hands and knees, and with his lantern on the ground before him, he began to search and soon to cry out triumphantly, as his search became successful:

"Hooray! Yere's a red breas'pin! I knows all 'bout dis! Dis is Miss Bevvie's! She use for to wear it in her collar at Owlwood, wid two red yere bobs to match!"

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"Give it to me. I will replace it in the casket," said Mr. Orkney.

Pepper surrendered the coral brooch and resumed his search.

"Hooray!" he cried again—"yere's anoder breas'pin! a fire glass un, as I nebber seed 'fo'."

And he held up a ruby cluster brooch.

"Well done, Pepper! Go on! You may recover all the jewelry, and in any case you shall be well rewarded," said Mr. Orkney, as he placed the ruby brooch beside the coral one in the casket.

The search was continued, and in the course of half an hour, or less, all the jewelry was recovered, with but little damage—such as a pin wanting in a brooch or a catch in an ear-ring.

"I fink dese is all, young marse! I doan see no mo'," said old Pepper, rising from his knees, after a supplementary and fruitless search.

"No; here are three complete sets, and an onyx ring. I think that these must be all," agreed Mr. Orkney.

"And how we gwine to carry all dese yere shawls an' rugs an' blankets, an' skirticoats home, young marse?" inquired Pepper, holding up the largest rug and looking at it longingly.

"I don't think we can carry them home at all, nor do I think they are worth taking," replied the young gentleman.

"Oh, Lor', young marse! See dis yere lubly, sof', warm rug! So good down on de flo', 'side de bed, to put a body's bare feet on, w'en dey fus' get up in de mornin'," pleaded Pepper.

"Yes, I dare say; but we cannot carry them," replied Mr. Orkney.

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"An' wot a blessin' dese yere warm fings would all be to de po' colored ladies a-libin' in de log cabins!"

"Well, you will have to bring a cart and carry them away on some future day. Now we will explore this cave. Bring your lantern this way."

Pepper obeyed, and followed the young gentleman around the cave, peering into every rough fissure in the rocks that looked like a crevice or pass to another cave.

At last they came to one. A fragment of an old gray blanket, that looked at a short distance like a piece of the face of the rocks, hung before and concealed an opening that evidently led into another compartment of what might, perhaps, be a chain of caverns.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANOTHER DISCOVERY

They lifted the blanket and passed in.

This second cave, though farther in than the first one, was not so dark. It seemed to be lighted by an irregular fissure that ran through the rocks above, and through which a wandering ray of sunshine straggled.

On the floor, directly under this natural skylight, was a natural reservoir, that must have received and, perhaps, at one time have been worn through by the falling rain. This seemed to be connected with some subterranean stream, for though the little reservoir was dry now, a deep gurgling could be heard at some distance below as of running waters.

This cave bore some rough signs of a former occupation.

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Against the farthest wall was a rude little fireplace, connected by a rude little chimney—both built of small fragments of rock—with a hole in the wall that must somewhere have reached the upper air.

In the crude fireplace were cold ashes that might have been there for years.

Near it, hanging on the wall, were some of the simplest cooking utensils, all of iron and all rusted beyond redemption.

There was a made-up pallet in one corner of the cave, and it was covered with a blue yarn counterpane, neatly tucked in all around.

Old Pepper went to lift up this counterpane to examine it, but it fell to pieces in his hands, nearly strangling him with the cloud of fluff and fuzz raised by the motion.

A man's great-coat hung on an iron peg driven into the rocks.

Mr. Orkney went to examine this, but at his lightest touch it dropped from the rusted peg, and when he stooped to pick it up, it fell to pieces.

Leaving the coat on the ground, he began to examine the walls. He found several rusty pegs, upon which fragments of rope or string hung, with here and there a piece of withered stalk or wilted root, the last left of what might have been large bunches of dried herbs or roots.

"Kaha! kaha! ka-ha-ha!" coughed old Pepper, dropping the counterpane and running away from its dust. "Dis yere look mons'ous like some man mus' ha' libbed yere some time or oder. Wot you fink, young marse?"

"Of course some man must have lived here, and I am inclined to think"—Mr. Orkney paused for a minute,

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and then added—"that it was the old herb and root doctor."

"Oh-h-h-h!" exclaimed old Pepper, opening his eyes wide with amazement.

"When I was a boy, spending my summer holidays at Hall-in-Umbra, there was an old colored man who used to come around about once a month with roots and herbs to sell, and who was reported to have made some very extraordinary cures."

"He did dat. Dat he did," asseverated old Pepper.

"But after my last visit I quite lost sight of the old man."

"Dat was 'fo' de wo'," said Pepper.

"Yes; that was before the war. Do you know what ever became of him?"

"Well, marse, no, not rightly, not for sartin. He used to come aroun' putty regular once a mont' 'fo' de wo', but arter de wo' he nebber come roun' no mo'; leastways, he nebber come our way, 'case I nebber see nuffin ob him."

"And did you never hear anything of him?"

"Well, yes, marse, we heerd. 'Bout free or fo' summers ago, in de middle ob de monf ob June, dere was de body ob an age-able old colored ge'man foun' dead unnerneaf ob an ole oak tree nigh de ferry, w'ich de crowner's 'quest set upon it, an' de witnesses indenturefied it to be dat ob de ole yarb doctor, as he died ob jes' drapping asleep dat summer mornin' in de shade ob de tree, in de 'streme ole ages of his pilg'imidge. An' de parish buried ob his mortal 'mains."

"Ah! that accounts for all I see here! Evidently the old man walked out that morning to make his usual round, and being tired, sat down under the tree to rest,

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fell asleep there and awoke in the other world. That was three or four years ago, you say?"

"Yes, marser—'bout dat. Leastways it mus' a been free year ago las' June."

"Did you see the body?"

"No, marse, I was at Owlwood den, workin' long ob ole Marse 'Lijah Mossop."

"Could that child have been anything to him, I wonder?"

"Lor', no, marse! W'y, she war Hera's little gal, yer know!"

"Yes; but afterward? After Hera had left her? Could the old herb doctor have carried off the child then?"

"Oh, goodness knows, marster, I couldn't tell yer dat! I dunno! But I shouldn' fink so. Wot would he want burdenin' ob himse'f wid a little gal on'y fibe year ole, as she was den? Not likely, marster."

"No; it is not likely. The story of that child is a mystery, and is likely to remain so, for she seems to be deprived of the faculty of speech and can give no account of herself. Well, Pepper, I think that we have made as many discoveries as possible for one day and that we had better return home."

"Lor' sake, young marse! Doan yer want some luncheon furs'? As fo' po' me, I's mos' starve to deaf; 'deed it's de trufe! I calls it onlawful to fas' so long! 'Deed I does! Onlawful!" urged Pepper.

"And you are quite right, old man. It is against the laws of nature, health and life. So we will eat. Where did you leave the lunch basket?"

"Out unnerneaf ob de oak tree w'ere de beastesses is tied."

"Come then," said Mr. Orkney, taking up the mala-

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chite casket and leading the way to the open air, followed by Pepper, who stopped in the outer cave only long enough to snatch up "Cha'ley's" red silk handkerchief, somebody's plaid shawl and the coveted rug.

These he was resolved to carry home that same afternoon.

When they got into the sunshine again, Pepper went and opened the basket, took a small table cloth from the top and spread it on the ground under the tree and arranged upon it the cold ham, chicken pie, bread, butter, cheese, bottle of wine and condiments.

Conrad Orkney threw himself down on the grass, and first of all filled and heaped up a large plate with the best of everything at hand and gave it to old Pepper, who with many bows and thanks carried it off to a respectful distance to devour the viands alone.

Conrad Orkney satisfied his own excellent appetite more deliberately, and then seeing that Pepper had got through with his performance, beckoned him to come and cut the cork of the wine bottle.

The old man came promptly enough to do this bidding, and having cut the cork, filled a glass for his master.

"Now, fill one for yourself, old man," said Mr. Orkney.

Pepper smiled and shook his head as he recorked the bottle, and put it down, saying:

"T'ank yer all de same, young marse! Champagne may be nice for young ge'men, dough I doubts water is better, but w'en an ole colored ge'man gets inter de ole ages ob his yethly pilg'imidge he 'quires ob somfing stronger an' warmer'n dat fizzy stuff! I nebber goes a journey 'dout 'widin' myse'f wid some ob dis yere 'liable ole rye w'isky."

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And with this old Pepper drew a flask from his pocket, bowed to his master and put the neck to his lips.

The sylvan repast being now over, Pepper repacked glasses and plates into the basket, and said:

"I did give the beastesses a little feed ob oats in deir nose bags, an' now, marse, as I 'scovered a little run ob clear water over yonder w'ere I eat my snack, hadn' I better take 'em down dere an' give 'em a drink?"

"Yes, old man," replied Mr. Orkney.

Pepper untied the horses and led them away.

In ten minutes he led them back.

Then master and man remounted and set out on their return to Hall-in-Umbra, where, after a long but very pleasant ride, they arrived safely about eight o'clock at night.

The moon had not yet reached the zenith, where it might have shone down upon their woodland path through the tops of the trees, so they were very glad when they emerged from the thicket and came out upon the ground in front of the hall. The lighted windows gleamed ruddily through the screen of vines that covered the front of the piazza.

Conrad Orkney drew rein at the horse-block, sprang from his saddle, threw the bridle to his groom, told him to lead both horses to the stable and rub them down and feed them, and then he ran up the steps.

He found Ora, wrapped in her favorite India shawl, pacing up and down the piazza, watching, of course, for him.

"You are late," she said. "But I am glad to see you at length. I hope you have had a pleasant day."

"Thank you, dearest. Yes, if any day could be pleasant to me away from your side, I have had a pleasant, because a successful one," he answered.

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"I am glad to hear it. Well, come in and have your tea with me first, and then you shall tell me all about it. My aunties and Bevvie have had theirs hours ago, and are now sitting around the wood fire in the oak parlor, knitting and gossiping to their hearts' content. Come into the dining room and we will take ours together," said Ora, leading the way, and followed by Conrad.

After this pleasant *tête-à-tête* evening meal they went together to the oak parlor to join the old ladies, who immediately besieged Conrad with questions as to what he had found in the caves.

The young man smilingly placed the malachite casket, with its recovered jewelry, on the table and—in answer to a chorus of questions from all present—begged to be permitted to tell his story in an orderly manner.

And while Mr. Conrad Orkney was relating the adventures of the day to interested listeners in the parlor, Mr. Pepper Hammer was giving a very exaggerated version of the same to a staring, gaping and astonished audience in the kitchen, where he took his supper.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WILDWOOOD WAIF

The next morning Pepper and Aleck harnessed a pair of strong mules to a farm wagon and drove them through the woods of Umbra to the Cave Creek Crossing.

There they took the mules from the wagon, and leaving the latter drawn up on the side of the road, mounted

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the former and turned into the bed of the dry creek to ride up to the caves.

They had to go in single file, which was not favorable to conversation.

Pepper in his quality of guide led the way.

The sure-footed mules made better progress than the horses of the previous day had done, so that about noon, by way of the dried-up creek and the deep gully, they passed through the wilderness of Umbra, and out into the open lying between that and the hoary mountain of the same name.

They tethered the mules to the old oak tree, and entered the caverns.

It was old Aleck's first sight of these gloomy subterranean abodes, and he hesitated before trusting himself within them.

What sort of devils might not live there? Why, they might even be the entrance of—of—the place old Aleck did not dare to name even in his thoughts.

But curiosity conquered fear, and he followed his leader.

The caves remained in the same condition in which Pepper had left them on the previous evening, all the miscellaneous articles being still scattered wildly about the ground.

The rugs, shawls, skirts, and scraps of carpets and of clothing in the first or outer cave were in a good state of preservation; but the bed quilt, blankets, overcoat and everything that was perishable in the second or inner cave, useless from dry rot or rust.

The negroes soon left the inner cave, without taking anything from it, concluding that this must have been the place "we're dat yar ole witch doctor libbed 'fo' he died."

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In the outer cave they found many more articles than had been discovered by Pepper in his first search.

A silver tuck comb; an amber necklace; a pair of gold bracelets; a carnelian heart attached to a slight gold chain; a turquoise locket; a topaz seal ring, and other articles of jewelry were found, hidden in the nooks and crevices about the cave; also a gay Roman scarf, a bright blue barege veil, high colored ribbons, and so forth.

Nearly all these articles were identified by the two negroes, who having known from their childhood everybody in the neighborhood and the jewelry and finery they possessed, were well qualified to do so. No creature so skilled in hiding or finding as the negro.

Pepper and Aleck made an exhaustive search, nor did they leave the cave until they were quite convinced that there was nothing more to be found there.

They brought everything away, tied into four large bundles, which they fastened together in pairs and swung across the backs of the two mules—a pair on each, after the manner of panniers.

When they had done this, they set out to return to Hall-in-Umbra—consuming their lunch, of bread, beef, and whisky, as they jogged along the Devil's Gully.

In due course they reached Cave Creek and later on Cave Creek Crossing, where they had left the wagon.

Here they dismounted, lifted the bundles from the backs of the mules and put them in the bottom of the wagon. Then they took from the same vehicle a bag of oats and a pair of pails and proceeded to feed and water the mules.

And after allowing them a short rest they harnessed them to the wagon, mounted the box, and side by side drove on toward Hall-in-Umbra.

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Pepper held the reins, and they talked of the recovered property.

"Must 'a been dat yar little catamount ob a gal wot stole 'em all! But 'ow she git inter people's houses an' out ag'in, t'rough fastened do's an' windies? Dat's de question," said Aleck.

"Yes! dat is de question, sure 'nough! But as to de stealin', I don't fink she was 'sponsible, I don't 'deed! I fink she's nuffin but a po' idiwut!" replied Pepper.

"Tell yer wot, brudder! heap o' po' colored people's characters will be cleared up now dese yere stoled property is 'scovered!" suggested Aleck.

"'Deed it's de trufe! Dere was Uncle Peter, allus unner de 'spicion ob takin' Marse Tomfilius' sealin' ring."

"Did Marse Tomfilius 'cuse Peter?'

"Law, no! Marse Tomfilius nebber 'cuse nobody, on 'spicion; but it were as a cloud, yer understan', as hung ober him."

"Oh, yes! I know," replied Aleck.

So talking they reached Hall-in-Umbra, just as the sun was setting and sending long lances of golden light through the autumn foliage of the trees.

They arrived full four hours earlier than the excursionists of the day previous had done; but then, they had started several hours sooner.

"Help me to tote dese yere fings inter de back piazzy, Aleck, an' den you take de mules roun' to de stable an' I'll go an' 'port to de young mist'ess," said Pepper, who, throughout the expedition, had taken the command.

All was done according to his orders and then the two men separatel—Aleck to astonish the negroes in the kitchen and Pepper to report to the family in the parlor.

The bundles were ordered to be brought into the hall,

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where they were, in turn, opened in the presence of the assembled household.

Many were the exclamations of surprise and pleasure as one lost treasure after another was produced.

"Dere's dat Ballymal skeert wot yer 'cused me o' takin'!" exclaimed Rachel, darting a look of injured innocence and indignant virtue toward Nelie, who was gazing with mingled feelings of delight and compunction on her recovered property.

"I'm sure I beg yer pardin ma'am! I—I ain't 'bove mendin' de honorable w'en I'm in de wrong!" said Nelie, with proud humility.

"'Saf' words butter no parsnips,' ma'am!" retorted Rachel.

But further amenities between the women were interrupted by the opening of the parcel containing the lost jewelry.

"There is Hyacinth's turquois locket!" exclaimed Ora.

"And Pink's carnelian heart!" added Bevvie.

"Here is Mr. Goodwin's topaz seal ring!"

"And Jessamine's amber necklace!"

"Here is Mrs. Arlington's silver comb!"

"Here are Margaret Colville's gold bracelets!"

And so on, and so on, as article after article was produced.

"Conrad, dear, you will please address a circular to the owners of all this treasure, telling them of its recovery, and where they may get it," said Ora.

The young gentleman bowed acquiescence.

The jewelry was then carefully put up, and the other coarser articles sent up to the stable loft, to await the claims of their owners.

Every one seemed to understand that these goods had

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been stolen and secreted by the little Wonder of the Woods, and that by the very nature and circumstances of the little creature, she was both morally and legally irresponsible for the thefts; but no one could conjecture how she effected her entrance into, or exit from, securely fastened houses.

Before the week was out, all the lost property was claimed and distributed.

Many persons who came in search of their lost and recovered treasures expressed a wish to see the little wild girl of the wilderness; but in no case would Miss Orkney consent to gratify this morbid curiosity.

She excused herself by saying that the child had been very badly torn by the dogs; that she was excessively timid; extremely afraid of strangers; and that by the doctor's orders she must be kept quiet.

This explanation seemed to satisfy all inquirers.

Meanwhile the little creature, tenderly cared for by Miss Orkney, and constantly watched by Hera, was convalescing rapidly.

That ugly wound, with a home-bred, daintily reared child, might have ended in loss of life, or limb, or at best in a long and tedious recovery. But with this wild creature of the wilderness, who had lived for years in the open air of the mountains or the pine woods, never, probably, getting under cover, except in bad weather, the strong and healthy organization, and the pure blood, promoted a rapid convalescence.

Now that her hair and nails were trimmed, and she was clean and well clothed, she was a very different-looking creature from the fantastic imp that had frightened so many people almost out of their wits.

Yet even now she was like no other child, black or white, on the face of the earth. The rolling and flash-

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ing of her great coal-black eyes, that seemed never to be still for an instant except when she was asleep, and the simultaneous gleaming and snapping of her snow-white teeth, kept up a kind of lightning from the dark face more suggestive of a fierce, wild animal than of a human child. Yet she had moods as gentle and caressing as those of the purring wildcat.

Shy and sullenly ferocious at the approach of any stranger, she tolerated the doctor, loved her mother, and adored her benefactress.

She showed this adoration in a feline manner by seizing and licking the hand of the young lady all over, much to the disgust and abhorrence of Miss Orkney, who, however, was much too tender to betray any repugnance to these strange demonstrations of affection.

In about ten days the child was quite well enough to go about her room, but she could not be confined to the room or the house.

She would creep stealthily out and peer and peep around, and at sight of any member of the family—except those whom she knew—would scamper back as fast as she could go and hide her head in her "mammie's" lap, trembling like a frightened kitten.

Hera proposed to Miss Orkney to take her away from Hall-in-Umbra.

"I's feared she'll be so troublesome, now she's took to runnin' 'bout, Miss Ora. An' I reckon Aunt Jenny an' Aunt Judy would gib us house room in deir cabin, for de help I could gib 'em in helpin' wid deir spinnin' an' knittin', an' sich," suggested Hera to the young mistress of the house.

"Aunt Jenny and Aunt Judy have but one room, and one bed, which they occupy together. They could not, without damage to health all around, take in another

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inmate. So you cannot go to them. Besides, Hera, I want you here. I am very much interested in that child. I wish to study her nature and watch its development. You will, therefore, if you please, Hera, stay and keep the child here for the present," said Miss Orkney.

"Jess' as you please, my young mist'ess! I's sure it is a great kindness in yer, miss, an' I's berry frankful for it too! But, oh, my dear young mist'ess, dis chile grow mo' an' mo' like a monkey ebery day! Sometimes she 'minds me ob a young kitten! Runnin' out, an' den soon as she sees anybody, scamperin' back hard as she kin an' hidin' ob herse'f! 'Deed, my dear young mist'ess, I's feared she's gwine to be a awful trouble!"

"Never mind the trouble; I wish to study her," said Miss Orkney.

This conversation took place in the disused rear room of the hall that had been turned into a bed chamber for the injured child.

The little creature had been a silent, attentive listener to this conversation. Squatting with feet and hands both upon the floor, and with her head and breast lifted, very much in the attitude of a quadruped, she had not understood a word that was spoken; yet with her animal instinct she had divined that she herself was the subject of controversy, which her benefactress had decided in her favor.

And so as soon as it was ended she leaped up like a monkey, and with rolling eyes and chattering teeth, sprang upon Miss Orkney, seized her hand, and licked and fondled it to her heart's content.

Ora endured the infliction as well as she could, and made her escape as soon as possible.

And so it was settled that the little Wonder of the Woods should remain at Hall-in-Umbra.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

BRIGHT DAYS

In God's world strength is lovely,
And so is beauty strong;
And light—God's glorious shadow—
To both great gifts belong;
And they all meet in sweetness
And fill the earth with song.
God's world has one great echo,
Whether calm blue mists are curled,
Or lingering dewdrops quiver,
Or red storms are unfurled;
The same deep love is throbbing
Through the great heart of God's world.

—ANONYMOUS.

So THE little Waif of the Wilderness remained at Hall-in-Umbra, and soon became the life, fun and dread of that well ordered establishment.

She was as shy, as wild, and as mischievous as a monkey. As soon as she was able to leave her bed she would watch her opportunity, when her mother was not looking, and dart out of the room into the hall, flash hither and thither, until at the sight of some member of the family she would start and scamper back as fast as she could go.

By degrees she grew bolder and would come to the open door of any room in which the family might be gathered, then stand staring at the company until some one would notice her, whereupon she would turn and scamper away as fast as possible.

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She grew still bolder. One day the family were at dinner. They had got through the heavy courses, and the dessert of fruit, nuts and sweetmeats was on the table. There was one vacant chair at the side of the table. Miss Constantia had a headache and had not come down to her dinner. A tempting stand of oranges and bananas stood near Miss Countie's empty place.

While the family circle were paring apples and cracking nuts, laughing and talking all the time, the wild child came to the door and stood staring at the table and the company. No one seemed to notice her; while right before her eyes glowed that stand of tempting fruit. She gazed at it and licked her lips.

Ora, who at last detected her presence, gave no sign at all, but furtively watched her.

The child licked her lips, and sighed, and gazed.

Ora was not at all prepared for what followed.

Suddenly the temptation quite overcame the little animal. Quick as a flash of lightning she darted to the table, seized an orange in each hand, and fled.

The company, surprised by the suddenness of the act, remained dumfounded for a moment and then burst into a simultaneous peal of laughter.

"But-but-but you will have to send her away, Ory. You will, indeeed! You can-can-can't keep her here if she acts that way," said Mrs. Mossop.

"No; I will not send her away, auntie. I am too much interested in watching her development. But I must have her closely looked after," Ora answered.

"Development? Why, she is an idiot, my dear Ora. What can she develop into?" inquired Conrad.

"I don't know. That is just what I want to discover. But I am sure she is no idiot. She has a very well-formed head for a colored child, and a face full of

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brightness. Besides, the people on this place who remember her as she was at five years of age, when she disappeared, declare that she was an uncommonly intelligent child—'berry clebber ob her age,' they say."

"And you think you may be able to make something of her?" laughed Mr. Orkney.

"I do not yet know. I must observe her longer before I can judge."

"Whey-whey-whey, upon the face of the yeth, has that gal been ever since she was missed from here?" inquired Mrs. Mossop.

"We have not been able to discover, auntie. She was found in the Caves of Umbra, you know. Perhaps she has lived there all the time."

"Who-who-who took care of her?"

"We do not know. Perhaps the old herb doctor did, as long as he lived. You know they found traces of the old herb doctor's residence in the inner cave."

"So-so-so I heerd. But when she disappeared, was she sto-sto-stolen, or did she run away?"

"We cannot tell. If the child should recover the powers of speech, which she only seems to have lost from disuse, and retains her memory, she may be able to give us some account of herself, otherwise I fear we shall never know more than we do now," said Ora; and as every one had finished dessert she gave the sign to rise, and the company left the table.

As this escapade of the wild girl went unpunished, and apparently unnoticed, it was soon repeated.

At tea time the next day the imp appeared at the open door of the dining room, and before any one had seen her she darted to the table, snatched two handfuls of cake, and scampered off.

"Well!" indignantly exclaimed Miss Countie, who

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was present. "After this, Oresta, I hope you will send that creature off the place, or have it chained up—one or the other."

"Ye-ye-yes! One or the other," assented Mrs. Mossop.

"I will really send her out of the house, aunties. I cannot, of course, allow her to annoy my friends in this way; but I shall keep her on the plantation; for, as I have before explained, I wish to watch her development," answered Ora.

And Miss Orkney carried out her plan.

There was a vacant cabin, or "quarter," as a plantation negro's dwelling was called, in that neighborhood, just a few yards in the rear of the mansion house.

The young lady caused a bed, table, chairs, and a few other articles of furniture to be placed in this cabin, and then assigned it to Hera as her lodging, at the same time giving the woman employment in plain sewing.

Here Hera lived with her child, grateful, happy, and industrious.

But—as the house servants at Hall-in-Umbra complained in despair—

"Not all the saints and angels in heaven could keep that wildcat from rushing into the great house, and doing whatever she pleased, and rushing out again before any one could catch her."

The little creature trusted in her own swiftness and agility; otherwise she was very wild and shy.

There was one member of the family of whom she was not afraid—and that was the young mistress of the house. She never ran away from Ora when she met the young lady alone, but she would run like a deer if she met her with another.

And if Ora was the one person in the house whom

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she did not fear at all, Miss Countie was the other extreme whom she feared most of all.

If, in the course of her trespassing, the imp happened to meet the tall, severe-looking old lady in the stiff black gown and high top comb, it did not start and scamper away as from the presence of any one less feared.

No! It uttered a yell of agony and stood paralyzed with terror, rooted to the spot, with chattering teeth and rolling eyes.

And Miss Constantia, who was not half as hard as she looked, would turn and hurry off from the uncanny presence.

Only then could the imp recover its powers of locomotion and hurry away.

So, in point of fact, the elf and the old woman always, in meeting, frightened each other almost into fits.

On one occasion they suddenly met on the lawn in front of the house, near the great horse-chestnut tree, when the imp uttered a shrill scream that seemed to pierce the clouds and awaken all the mountain echoes, and then she stood rooted to the spot with her great black and white orbs rolling fearfully, and her teeth chattering like a pair of castanets.

Miss Countie, with a shudder and a groan, turned and trotted into the house.

And the imp, now that the spell was broken, started and fled up the tree as quickly and easily as a cat could have climbed it.

In the meantime Miss Countie hurried, pale and panting, to complain to Ora of the wild creature. A meeting with it always upset her nerves, and on this occasion, when the imp ran up the tree, she very nearly fainted.

"I tell you, Oresta," she said, "if you don't have that thing chained up, it will be the death of me."

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"I will do the very best I can, dear Aunt Countie; but really you know the poor little creature is quite harmless," said Ora, soothingly.

"'Harmless'! It looks like a little devil. If it was to bite me, I know I should have the hydrophobia and die raging mad."

"But she will not bite you, auntie."

"How do I know? Every time it sees me, it howls at me and snaps at me like a mad dog."

"Dear auntie, the poor little thing is afraid of you, and cries and chatters with extreme fear—nothing but fear, Aunt Countie."

"I know it will kill me," whimpered the "severe" old lady.

"I will see to it, auntie, that she does not annoy you in future," replied Ora.

And in order to keep her word she induced the two old centenarians, Aunt Jenny and Aunt Judy, to change lodges for the winter with Hera and Meenie.

This she proved to both parties to be the best plan for them all.

Now that cold weather was coming, the moss-covered hut in the woods would seem too distant a dwelling place for the infirm old negresses to receive prompt help from the hall when they might need it. Hera's cabin in the rear of the mansion would be so much safer for them, while the hut in the woods would be just the place for the strong young mother and the wild child, where it was supposed the latter would be kept in bounds and out of mischief.

But could she?

The change was effected in a day, for the women had but little furniture to remove, and Charley, Pepper and Zeno all helped in the transportation.

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All parties seemed pleased.

"It's jess like payin' ob a long wisit. Jess like comin' on a wisit to spen' de winter 'long ob our young mist'ess," said Aunt Jenny, and Aunt Judy echoed her.

"Besides, your meals will be sent to you from the hall table, so that you need never have the trouble of cooking unless you like to cook for amusement," added Ora.

On the other hand, Hera said:

"It's such a 'lief to my min' to take dis chile 'way f'om de house. I 'clare, Miss Ory, I ain't had a quiet minit since she got well, fear she'd do somefin awful."

"I have never feared so. The child is quite harmless," replied the young lady.

Ora, however, never intended that this arrangement should outlast the winter. She knew that the two old women would want their wildwood nest as soon as the trees should be in leaf in the spring, and she knew that she might then safely bring Hera and her wild child back to the hall, from whence her visitors would long before have departed.

After the change a few days passed in peace. Hera, bringing home a dozen pillow cases that she had been making, reported that Meenie was very good, and amused herself by climbing trees, in scampering through the woods, and catching hares, rabbits and squirrels, in doing which she displayed a canine instinct united with human intelligence, and also in trying to talk, and making so little improvement in that art.

At first "Mimmie" had been her only word. Now she said "cold" when she shivered, "hung'y" when she fasted.

"She could talk fas' 'nough 'fo' de wo', an' now, I

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finks maybe it is all a-comin' back to 'er," Hera explained.

"You do not think she is an idiot, then, Hera, I hope?" inquired the young lady.

"She an idiwut! No, indeed, ma'am. She's got a heap mo' sense 'an some ob dese yere darkies wot calls 'er out'n 'er name. She's jes' as bright as a new penny, an' as sharp as a steel trap. She knows heap mo' 'an she can tell 'til she 'covers ob her speech."

"What do you suppose prevents her from talking now?"

"Hi, young mist'ess, she done got out'n de habit ob it. Dat's all. Out'n de habit ob it froo libin' 'long ob de wile creeturs ob de woods."

"You say she is skilful in catching game?" inquired Ora.

"Yes, honcy."

"Then she must be valuable to you in supplying your table."

"Young mist'ess, dere's we're yer is mistaken. It's very agravokin', but she won't let me hab one ob de wile creeturs to kill an' cook," said Hera, with an injured look.

"Why, what does she do with them when she catches them?"

"Oh, honey, she jes' plays 'long o' dem, and hugs 'em an' licks their faces, till she do make me sick at de stommik."

"They were all her playfellows, probably, before she was caught," suggested Miss Orkney.

"Dat's it, young mist'ess. Dat's jes' wot I fink myse'f, an' de reason w'y she catch dem so easy dey jes' lets her do it. Dey ain't feared ob her."

"I can understand that."

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"Why, young mist'ess, fust time she caught one ob dem, w'ich was de fust day we moobed to de hut in de wood, an' it were a great big hare as she cotch, she sot down to play wid it unnerneaf ob a tree, an' I went to take it f'om her an' she held it fast and screeched at me till my ha'r riz on top o' my head; an' she jumped up and scampered away t'rough de woods, w'ere she let de ole hare go! An' many as she catches, she won't let me have one! She runs away an' lets 'em all loose in de woods."

"Another trait of character discovered in my little Wonder of the Wilderness," said Ora to herself, as she gave Hera a fresh batch of sewing to take home with her.

CHAPTER XXIX

ELFISH ANTICS

NEARLY a week passed without any annoyance from the little pest, and Ora and her friends were congratulating themselves on a final deliverance from it, when they were rudely shocked from their self-complacent false sense of security.

It was one morning in December, when Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia Orkney awoke to find their room at a freezing temperature and the fire in the open chimney burned entirely out and reduced to a heap of cold ashes!

There was no bell in the room wherewith to summon a servant.

"Do-do-don't you stir, Countie! You-you-you'll be laid up with the rheumatics if you do! I'll put on my

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shoes and wrap myself up in a shawl and open the window shutters and then I'll go and call Betsy," said Mrs. Mossop.

And the old lady arose and did as she had said, leaving the door slightly ajar behind her.

Miss Constantia covered up her head to keep warm until the fire should be kindled.

She soon thought she heard some one stirring in the room, and believing that her sister had returned, or that one of the servants had entered with wood, she uncovered her head and looked out.

Oh, horror! Did ever respected spinster of sixty years behold such a sacrilegious, blood-curdling sight!

There, before the dressing table, between the two front windows, stood the imp, with Miss Countie's false front tied around its forehead and Miss Countie's false teeth in its hand!

Heaven and earth and the other place!

Miss Countie stared, then shrieked, then jumped out of bed!

Yes! forgetful of fear, forgetful of cold, she sprang out of bed with her bare feet on the bare floor, to give chase and rescue her sacred treasures—parts of her very self! What was life worth without hair and teeth?

So in defiance equally of Jack Frost and the Wood Imp, she sprang out into the freezing temperature to recover her goods.

But the imp was too quick for her! At the first sound of Miss Countie's shriek the creature had started and stood still for one moment of agonized terror, but when the old lady leaped out of bed, and rushed toward it, desperation gave wings to its feet, and—still wearing the false front and holding on to the false teeth—it

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darted to the cold fireplace and disappeared up the chimney, with the swiftness of a swallow.

Miss Countie staggered back and dropped into the nearest chair.

Ora, aroused by her first cry, had started up from her own couch, thrust her feet into slippers, drawn on a dressing gown and run in to see what was the matter, arriving just in time to witness the imp's flight up the chimney and Miss Countie's fall into the chair.

"Dear aunty! What is all this?" inquired the astonished girl.

"Oh! oh! oh!" groaned Miss Countie.

"Go-go-go-go right back to bed, Constantia! You-you-you'll get your death o' cold sitting there in your bed gown and bare feet!" exclaimed Mrs. Mossop, who now entered, followed by Betsy with a basket of kindling wood and Old Charley with an armful of logs.

But Miss Countie burst into a storm of hysterical tears and sobs, without seeming able to stir from the spot.

"Please take one of her arms, aunty, while I take the other, and we will get her into bed and cover her up to wait until the fire can be kindled and the room gets warm," said Ora.

And so they put Miss Countie to bed again, and Ora sat down by her side to ask an explanation of the scene she had partly witnessed.

"Oh! oh! oh! it was that wildcat! It was that wildcat!" cried Miss Countie.

"Do you mean Hera's child? I saw her! I saw her dart to the fireplace and scamper up the chimney! That at least clears up another mystery in a way I should never have dreamed of! She must have always entered the room and left it, with her wonderful agility in

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climbing, by that chimney. Has she done any mischief, aunty?"

"Mischief! Oh! oh! oh! She's got my—she's got my——"

Miss Countie paused. She could not bring herself to say "false front and false teeth"—these appendages being ignored by, though known to, the family.

"What has she got, aunty?"

"Oh, send somebody to fetch a ladder and go up on the roof after her! She must be on the roof!" cried Miss Countie.

Ora spoke to Old Charley, who, having piled the hickory logs upon the fire, now stood by grinning, and drinking in every word of the conversation.

"Go, Charley, and get a ladder and send one of the boys up on the roof. Send another after Hera. And if you see the child up there, try to coax her down," said Ora.

"Yes, young mist'ess. I'll do all yer say; but yer jes' might's well try to coax a 'coon down out'n a tree as to coax dat idiwut. It won't do nuffin it don't want to do," said the old man, as he left the room.

Ora went off to dress in a hurry.

Miss Countie also arose and hastily put on her clothes.

Soon all the family, well wrapped to protect themselves from the cold, stood on the snow outside of the house on that cold, clear December morning, watching a singular exhibition.

The high barn ladder was set against the front of the house, reaching from the ground to the eaves, above which arose the steep roof.

On the top rung of the ladder stood Mr. Conrad Orkney, by turns commanding, exhorting, and entreating

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the impish creature on the top of the chimney to come down.

But she sat there, grinning, rolling her eyes, chattering, mopping and mowing, far more like a monkey than a human being.

At length Hera arrived on the spot and began to plead with her wayward child to come to her arms. But the uncanny creature drew back, and laughed aloud while it performed a wild dance on the top of the chimney, sometimes letting itself seem to drop down the chimney, thus exciting screams of horror from the spectators below; and then, with a loud laugh and a volley of chatters, she would suddenly reappear on the top again.

"That half devil's imp, half wildcat, has shattered my whole nervous system! It has, indeed!" wailed Miss Countie.

Even Hera began at last to weep bitterly. She had ceased, in despair, to importune the wilful child.

But when the imp saw her mother's tears of distress, the wild heart was touched.

She uttered a succession of cooing sounds and began rapidly to descend the outside of the chimney by holding on and sliding down the lightning rod to the apex of the roof.

There the temptation of the situation again overcame her, and she began to dance to and fro on that high ridge, with more than the skill and agility of the most accomplished acrobat, chattering and gibbering, mopping and mowing, grinning, and rolling her eyes without ceasing.

Again Hera's tears, which had stopped for awhile, broke out afresh.

And then the excitable imp began to coo and smile, as she skipped to the side of the roof adorned with the

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lightning rod, which she again seized to aid her in her descent to the ground.

On reaching *terra firma* she made for the shelter of her mother's arms; but meeting Miss Countie in her path, full face to face, she uttered a howl of horror and darted up the nearest tree until she reached its highest branches, where she sat chattering and gibbering defiance to all and sundry.

"I fink, Miss Ory," said poor Hera, "that if you will get the ladies and eberybody else to go inter de house an' leabe me here 'lone, long ob de chile, I fink I can coax her to come down an' gimmy de fings wot she's took away."

"I am sure that you are right, Hera! And we will go in. Breakfast must be ready."

And Ora invited her guests to re-enter the house to sit down to the morning meal.

Miss Constantia did not come to the table. She was not going to make her appearance on any scene where she would have to uncover her head or open her mouth, without her hair and teeth.

So she went up to her own room and had her breakfast served to her there—a light, unsatisfactory breakfast of rich coffee and soft cream toast.

Meanwhile Hera, on the outside of the house, succeeded in coaxing her wayward child to come down out of the tree.

The imp descended, laughing and chattering with delight—evidently enjoying the excitement she had created.

With little difficulty Hera also succeeded in coaxing the wild creature to give up the false front, which she still wore tied around her head, and the false teeth, which she had hidden in her bosom.

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"Good gracious! I didn' once 'spect as she had tuk dese fings! I s'pose she t'ought as dey was beads or somefin she could 'dorn herse'f wid. Lor's knows she doan want no false teef! Neber seed purtier w'ite teef dan hern!"

As soon as the child had given up the rifled properties, she laughed aloud and scampered off through the woods in the direction of the hut.

Hera stepped around to the rear of the house, and waited until she saw Old Charley passing on one of his many errands between the dining room and the kitchen, while waiting on the breakfast table.

She beckoned him to come out to speak with her.

And when he came, she said:

"Uncle Cha'ly, I want yet to get me two pieces ob clean paper to wrap up somfin I's got to gib back to Miss Countie, w'ich I doan like to han' it to her so bare-face like."

"Wot is it, Hery?" inquired the old man.

"It's somfin wot dat po' little innercen' Meenie tuk out'n Miss Countie's room," replied the woman, evasively.

"But wot is it, den?"

"Nebber you mine wot it is, Uncle Cha'ly! It ain't nuffin wot no ge'man hasn' got no call to know nuffin 'bout," said Hera, piling on her negatives in the most emphatic manner.

Which iterated negation did not repulse Charley.

"I fink as yer might 'fide inter sich a ole faithful fellow servant as I is, Mrs. Hera 'Gomery," he said, with a look of wounded affection.

"Well, dere, den! Ef yer mus' hab it, dere, den!" exclaimed Hera, opening the wide white apron that she

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had held gathered up like a bag before her, and displaying the false front and the false teeth.

Old Charley plunged his hand down and brought up the false front.

"De Lor's! W'y, wot's dis yere? W'y, it's a wig!" he exclaimed, grinning as he turned it around in his hands to examine it.

"Dere, drap it! Drap it 'fo' some ob de w'ite folks come an' ketch yer!" exclaimed Hera, excitedly.

Charley dropped the "wig" only to snatch up the teeth —a full set of upper ivories.

"De Lor' a'mighty! Wot dis yere? I nebber see nuffin like dis in all de days ob my pilg'imedge 'fo'. Wot is it? Bit o' skull, ain't it?" he inquired, gazing at the curiosity with wonder and astonishment.

"Yes; it is a relick. Dere, drap it and go fetch me two sheets ob w'ite paper," said Hera, in growing fear of interruption.

Charley disappeared into the house, but soon reappeared with several sheets of white paper in his hands.

Hera carefully wrapped these precious fragments of Miss Countie's material personality in two neat parcels, and entered the house with them.

She went up stairs to Miss Countie's room, believing the dreaded old lady to be at that moment down at the breakfast table, and intending to leave them on the top of the bureau; but on entering the room and seeing Miss Countie seated in the easy chair before the fire, she could only say, in the humblest tone, as she placed the parcels in the owner's lap:

"I hab fotch yer back somefin', ma'am, as dat po', misfortunit chile o' mine carried 'way wid 'er. She didn't know no better, ma'am. 'Deed it's de trufe. I hope as you'll 'scuse 'er."

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"Excuse her!" exclaimed the irate old lady. "I'll have her taken up by the constable and put in jail for stealing, as sure as I am a living woman I will, unless you carry her clear off the plantation and out of the neighborhood."

"I am berry sorry for all she hab did, ma'am, an' so would she be ef she had sense 'nough to know right f'om wrong, w'ich she hasn't," pleaded Hera.

"Do you chain her up until you take her out of the neighborhood! Do you hear? If you don't, I'll send the constable after you both. Do you hear?"

"Yes, ma'am; w'ich I hope as yer won't have no mo' trouble wid her," said Hera, humbly, but evasively.

"I hope not. If I do, you will have cause to repent it!" said Miss Countie, firing her last shot.

Hera courtesied deferentially and left the room, without feeling the slightest anxiety in regard to her wayward child, so sure was she of the younger Miss Orkney's powerful protection. So with good courage she returned to her hut.

What measures the mother took with her wild child, or whether she took any, to prevent it from troubling the family at the hall; or whether, after its last extravagant escapade, the imp itself was afraid to return thither, is not known; but it is certain that Miss Orkney nor her friends neither saw nor heard anything from the little Wonder of the Woods for many days.

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CHAPTER XXX

CHRISTMAS

It was Christmas Eve—what the old folks called a good, old-fashioned Christmas Eve; for the snow was deep all over the ground, with a sheet of hard ice on top of it, making the traveling very good, especially with sleighs; and the sky was clear, cold and blue above.

The guests still lingered at Hall-in-Umbra. Several days had been set for their departure, which had been postponed from time to time; and, indeed, there was no particular necessity for either Mrs. Mossop or Miss Constantia Orkney to return in haste to Owlwood. They had left no family behind them, and the house would be safe with the faithful old housekeeper, as the farm would be with the overseer.

Besides, it was so very seldom—not more than once in ten years—that these old ladies left home for a long visit, that they could not be criticized for making this a very long one. So now they stayed on at Hall-in-Umbra, and intended to stay until after New Year, to be present at the wedding of their nephew and niece, Conrad and Ora Orkney, which was to come off early in January.

It was to be a good, old-fashioned wedding. The ceremony to be performed by the pastor of their own parish, at nightfall, in the long drawing room of their own ancestral home and in the presence of all their own friends and neighbors.

Squire Goodwin was to give away the bride, and his five fair flower daughters were to officiate as bridesmaids.

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Dr. Leicester was to act as first groomsman, and the young Messrs. Arlington, Farnsworth, Colville and Belden as second, third, fourth and fifth.

The festivities were to wind up with a ball and supper.

The young couple were to start for Richmond by the midnight express, leaving Hall-in-Umbra in care of Mrs. Mossop, Miss Constantia Orkney and Bevvie, for the time being.

Such was the programme.

Conrad Orkney had gone to Richmond on business, but was expected back on this Christmas Eve.

The country negroes always begin Christmas several days in advance of the day, and generally by firing off guns and pistols, which are frequently in so bad a condition as to leave the marksmen with mutilated fingers or scarified faces.

This Christmas was no exception to the rule. The negroes had spent every leisure moment in incessant firing, keeping it up until midnight, and in some instances until morning, so that the bang! bang! bang! and the boom! boom! boom! of fire-arms ceased not day nor night.

The effect of all this noise upon most hearers was annoying; upon one it was disastrous.

Early on the morning of this Christmas Eve, as Ora descended to the breakfast parlor, she was met by Hera, who, with a look of the deepest distress, begged to speak with her alone for a few minutes.

"What is it, Hera?" inquired Miss Orkney, when she had led the woman into that back room once occupied by the child.

"Oh, Miss Ory!" cried Hera, sinking into a chair and covering her face with her hands.

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"What is it? Nothing has happened to the poor little girl, I hope!"

"Oh, Miss Ory! yes, it has! She is lost again!" sobbed Hera.

"Lost!" exclaimed Miss Orkney.

"Oh, yes, honey, lost! Lost ebber since yes'd'y mornin'!"

"Since yesterday morning! Oh, why did you not tell me of this sooner, that I might have sent to search for her!" exclaimed Ora.

"Oh, my dear young mist'ess, 'cause I couldn't beliebe she war los' at fust! I kept 'spectin' ebery minute as she would come back! She's so queer, yer know, gwinin' an' comin' at sech odd times. An' I kept 'spectin' ob her back ag'in ebery minit mos' all day long, till it wer' too late to come yere an' tell yer. An' all de long night I wandered 'bout de woods callin' ob her, an' like to got shot ebber so many times by dem fool niggers firin' off guns, like a battle in de wo'! An' soon as de sun riz I come right ober yere to tell yer all 'bout it an' ax yer 'vice. Oh, my po' little gal! my po' little innercen gal!" sobbed the woman.

"We must send all the men through the woods in search of her! When did you miss her first?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Yes'd'y mornin', w'en she heerd de fuss Christmas gun fired right close by de house, she run right out ob de do' an' I ain't seen nuffin ob her sence. Oh, my po' gal! my po' gal! I 'spected her to come back nex' minit to get her breakfas', 'cause she hadn' had any, an' she so moughty fond ob eatin' too! But she nebber come back, an' I ain't seen her f'om dat time to dis! an' dat was yes'd'y mornin'! Oh, my po' gal! Wot hab come ob her!" exclaimed Hera, with a fresh burst of tears.

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"No ill has come to her, I feel quite sure, Hera. She seems to have taken care of herself for years before you recovered her, and I think she is still perfectly well able to do so. However, I will send all the men of the place to hunt her up. But tell me, do you suppose that she was frightened away by the firing?"

"Oh, yes, young mist'ess, I do fink as it was dat, an' nuffin but dat, as scared away my po' gal! An' now I come to 'member how bad she was scared at de firin' ob de cannon at de battle ob Black Mount'in, ebber so far away, w'en she was a little fing only fibe years ole, I fink maybe dat mus' been wot made her run away de fus' time! I nebber did fink ob it in dat light befo', but I fink so now."

"Indeed, I think you are right!" exclaimed Ora, as a new light broke on her mind also. "The booming of the cannon frightened the child on that long past day, and when she missed her mother, her natural protector, she was afraid to stay within its sound, and so she ran away and was probably found by the old herb doctor and sheltered by him, as long as he lived, in the caves. And as all the plantation thought naturally that you had taken her away with yourself and no inquiry was made, no news was heard of her."

"Yes, dat must have been de way ob it, young mist'ess. An' de firin' hab scared her away ag'in. But, oh, whey is she now? Oh, my po' gal! My po' gal!"

"Don't cry, Hera. You may depend that she has fled to the caves to hide herself. I shall send Charley and Pepper there at once. Come! I will step into the kitchen and tell Nelie to give them some breakfast immediately, so that they can eat it while the stable boys saddle their horses. Cheer up, my poor woman. Your child shall be with you before night."

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Ora's promise was kept and her prophecy fulfilled. Before sitting down to breakfast she dispatched her messengers to the caves, with strict orders to follow the course of the creek and the gully to the foot of Mount Umbra; and before sunset they returned with the child, whom they had found in the cave, quietly feeding upon Indian walnuts and hickory nuts, which were then to be found in great quantities on the ground beneath their respective trees in the woods of Umbra, and which she cracked between two stones.

They had no difficulty in capturing the child, for she recognized in old Pepper the friend who had rescued her from the dogs on the occasion of the 'coon hunt when she was first discovered, and she easily consented to trust herself to him.

Hera, who was waiting anxiously at the hall for the return of the men, was overjoyed at the sight of her child, whom she clasped close to her breast and covered with caresses.

"But what on de face ob de yeth shall I do wid 'er, young mist'ess? She'll be allers a-gettin' ob us inter hot water," said Hera, in perplexity.

Miss Orkney smiled and shook her head, for she could offer no solution to the difficulty.

Hera took the child back to the hut in the woods, but had to keep fast hold of her, for every time a gun was fired the wild creature echoed the sound with shrieks of "bang! bang! bang!" or "boom! boom! boom!" trembling, rolling her eyes, and struggling to break away and run off.

Meanwhile at Hall-in-Umbra preparations were making to receive more guests for Christmas, namely, Conrad Orkney, the bridegroom expectant, and the Pendletons, who were to come down for the wedding.

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A long and elegant supper table was laid in the dining room, and Nelie, aided by Rachel, had expended all her culinary skill and experience in the preparation of a feast worthy of the occasion.

The empty spare rooms on the upper floor and in the rear of the house had been elegantly fitted up with the furniture that had arived from New York, via steamboats and freight trains, and all was in readiness to receive the guests.

They were expected to reach the railway station, to which Miss Orkney's new carriage had been sent to meet them, at six o'clock, and to arrive at Hall-in-Umbra at eight.

It was about half past seven when the whole family circle, dressed handsomely in honor of the expected company, were assembled in the long drawing room, waiting to receive them.

"I fee-fee-feel as if I was living qui-qui-quite an ex-extravagant and dis-dissipated life," said innocent Mrs. Mossop, as she felt of her "real" lace cap, and surveyed her lavender silk dress; for she had seen more company and had more excitement in the last two months than she had in the whole course of her hitherto quiet life.

Miss Constantia Orkney, regal in a plum-colored poplin and a very high back comb, replied that she thought it was quite time for them to return to their duties at Owlwood, and that they must do so as soon as possible.

Ora, in a light blue cashmere, trimmed with white silk and lace, looked the handsome Hebe full of life and joy that she ever seemed.

Bevvie, in a crimson merino and black lace, was more beautiful than ever, notwithstanding the deep melancholy of her face, which was the only overclouded one in the whole circle.

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Ora had noticed this with much uneasiness, and as soon as she could do so without attracting the notice of her aunts, she went to her protégé, and laying her hand on the young creature's dark head, said, in her old, caressing way:

"What troubles you, Bevvie, dearest?"

"Oh, Ora, nothing new! Never mind me. We have our hours of depression, you know," replied the young woman.

"Bevvie! do you think my marriage is to make any difference in my love for you?"

"No, Ora, but—but—all the same I feel myself to be in a most cruelly false position; a real embarrassment to your life even now! but when you are married, Ora—— Hush! There is the carriage!"

It was indeed the carriage bringing the travelers from the railway station.

And the next moment the drawing room door was thrown open by Old Charley, and Mr. Conrad Orkney entered, accompanied by a young man who stood a little in the background.

Scarcely giving himself time to greet his friends, and totally ignoring their inquiries for the Pendletons, he turned respectfully to the stranger, and presented him to the young lady of the house, saying:

"Miss Orkney, I have the pleasure of bringing you an old acquaintance, Prince Frederick of Hohenfels!"

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CHAPTER XXXI

LOVE SHALL BE LORD OF ALL

Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And earth beneath, and heaven above.

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
Are but the ministers of love,
And feed his sacred flame.—COLERIDGE.

YES, indeed; it was true!

The "Fairy Prince" had really come back, looking as honest, simple and happy as if there was nothing awkward to be explained in his absence and silence of more than fourteen months. Looking as candid, faithful, boyish and altogether trustworthy as Bevvie remembered him to have looked when she first saw him and gave him her esteem and confidence, afterward trusting him through all evil appearances. Looking, in fine, as pure and true a gentleman as she had believed him to be when she took that perilous "leap in the dark" for love of him.

For one breathless moment they gazed, spellbound by astonishment. Then:

"Prince!!!" exclaimed Ora, in unbounded amazement. And:

"Fritz!!!" broke from Bevvie, with a cry of joy.

Prince Frederick received his wife upon his breast, and holding her close to his heart with his left arm, offered his right hand to Miss Orkney.

"Prince, this is indeed a great and glad surprise," said Ora, as she very cordially welcomed him.

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Bevvie uttered not another word.

Half fainting under the weight of her happiness, she leaned upon the bosom of her husband.

"I thank you very much, madam; but—a surprise?" inquired the prince, looking perplexed.

"A very great and glad surprise, as I said. But, pray be seated. Presently I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to our relatives here; but in the meantime, sit," said Miss Orkney, as she lightly waved her hand toward a short *tête-à-tête* divan that stood nearest to them.

Prince Frederick bowed, and led his wife to the sofa, placed her on it, and seated himself beside her.

Ora looked around for her aunts, but found they had slipped out of the room, probably to add some extra finery to their toilet in honor of the new arrival.

Conrad had also withdrawn from the room, momentarily.

Ora seated herself at some short distance from the pair on the sofa, while Bevvie, still faint and mute, sat leaning her head on the shoulder of her husband.

"You repeat that my arrival was a surprise, madam," said the prince, reverting to the "previous question," and addressing Miss Orkney by the title he deemed most deferential.

"A complete surprise," reiterated Ora.

"But I wrote from Hohenfels to announce my voyage. I wrote a week before I sailed for New York."

"We never got that, or any other letter."

"Ah! I wrote not from New York, because I delayed not, on reaching port, to take the first train *en route* for Richmond, where I hoped I might perhaps find you with our friends, Herr Pendleton and family.

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To them went I first on my arrival. From them heard I the first news that had reached me for many months. My happy marriage was now proclaimed, they told me. The princess was at Hall-in-Umbra with Miss Orkney, they said. And glad was I of the good tidings. There, also, I the happiness had to meet with Herr Conrad Orkney. He was to travel down to Hall-in-Umbra. Invited he me to go him with. Then telegraphed I to announce our arrival. Yet say you it is a complete surprise."

"We did not get your telegram, prince; but, then, the nearest telegraph office is several miles off from us, and a messenger to bring the dispatches is not always at hand. We shall probably receive your telegram in the morning," Ora replied, with a smile.

"Twenty-four hours after it has useless grown," replied the prince.

The stately entrance of Miss Constantia Orkney, followed by the meeker figure of Mrs. Mossop, made a diversion. As the two ladies sailed into the room, Prince Frederick, gently raising Bevvie's head from his shoulder, stood up to receive them.

Ora presented the prince in due form.

Miss Constantia courtesied very stiffly, and held out her black lace mittened fingers, which the young man gallantly took and bowed over.

But Mrs. Mossop held his hand in both of her soft, chubby palms as she said:

"I am very glad to see your lor-lor-lordship. I hope your gra-gra-grace is well. We shall be very happy to see your ma-ma-majesty any time at Owlwood."

Prince Frederick smiled and bowed very sweetly and graciously. He did not understand or appreciate the titles the old lady had stammeringly honored him with.

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Conrad Orkney, taking upon himself the duties of a host toward his late traveling companion, conducted the new guest to his room, that the latter might refresh his toilet before going to supper. Ora then went to the side of Bevvie and whispered:

"Try to rouse yourself, my dear."

"Oh, Ora! I don't want to, for fear I should wake up to find it all a dream. I am in such a happy trance now," murmured Bevvie.

"I do not wonder. You will have to sleep on it to-night, and wake up to the fact to-morrow morning before you can realize it all," replied Miss Orkney.

"But, oh, Ora, I do want to show him baby. I wonder if he dreams there is a baby!"

"Of course, he knows that there is one. The Pendletons have told him everything. Or if they have omitted any item of news, Conrad has supplied it."

"But he never inquired for baby."

"My dear, he has not had a chance to do so. Wait until you are alone."

A few minutes later Prince Frederick and Mr. Conrad Orkney re-entered the drawing room.

They came up with easy grace, and seated themselves near the two younger ladies, who occupied the *tête-à-tête* sofa.

"You have not asked for, nor have I volunteered to give, any explanation of my fourteen months' absence and silence. And now I think we must defer all explanation until the morning. It is a long story, my gracious lady, to-night to begin. But, in the meantime, assert I that my explanation shall clear me of all blame, and satisfy you of all doubts."

"I believe you. I always confided in you, through

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everything. Why could you not have trusted me as well?" demanded Ora.

"Would you to my marriage with your ward have consented?" inquired the young gentleman, with a bow.

"Under the peculiar circumstances? No; certainly not!" replied Ora.

"You would not then have trusted me so far, gracious lady. Therefore could not I the secret confide to you."

"It is not because I could not have trusted you to redeem all your pledges, prince, that I should have forbidden the marriage; but because I believe secret marriages to be irregular and disorderly," said Ora frankly.

"But that past is. And the marriage public is made. And me you forgive, gracious madam?" inquired the young man, with the frank and boyish smile that had always been so attractive to Ora.

"Utterly, utterly. I did not mean to allude to this subject. You brought it in," replied Ora with a smile.

The appearance of Old Charley to announce supper put an end to the conversation.

And soon after the evening meal was ended the circle separated and retired to rest.

The newly furnished rooms on the upper floor that had been prepared for the defaulting guests, the Pendletons, were now assigned to the prince.

Conrad Orkney, acting host, escorted him to the door and left him there.

And there the young husband had found his youthful wife waiting in delight to show him his infant son.

Meanwhile Miss Orkney found that she had two other unexpected lodgers—awkward lodgers in a house where all the domestics were colored folk, for these new ones were the German servants, valet and groom, of Prince Frederick.

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After some discussion with her aunts, she put these two foreigners together in the room once occupied by Hera and Meenie.

Ora then retired to the room over the oak parlor, which had once been her father's and her mother's, but which she had lately occupied with Bevvie and the baby.

Now she found the room and the baby's crib empty, and sighed with a lonesome feeling as she missed her little pet; but—she had not finished her night toilet when the door opened and in walked Rachel with the sleeping child in her arms.

"Miss Bevvie called me to her door an' gave me baby an' tol' me to carry him down to you ag'in, fear you'd miss him," said Rachel, as she laid the infant in the crib.

"Oh!" exclaimed Ora, and then she said: "But you must not call that lady 'Miss Bevvie' any longer, Rachel."

"Berry well, young mist'ess, I'll 'member," replied Rachel, as she left the room. And thenceforth she called the young lady "Mrs. Prince."

In the opposite room, the long chamber, the two old aunts, Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia Orkney, were getting ready for bed.

Miss Countie took that opportunity, the first one she had had for a private interview with her sister, to take that good woman to task for her behavior.

"You mortified us all very much this evening, Marcie Mossop!" she said, as she took her high top comb out of her iron gray hair and laid it on the dressing bureau.

"I-I-I mortified you? How-how-how did I mortify you?" inquired the good old lady, sinking into an arm chair.

"You behaved like a she-snob to the prince."

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"Wha-wha-what do you mean, Countie?"

"And you betrayed your ignorance besides!"

"Cou-Cou-Countie, you are very dis-dis-disagreeable to-night. Wha-wha-what did I do so very bad?"

"You kept calling him 'your majesty,' and 'your grace,' and 'your lordship,' and a lot of rubbish! Showing your ignorance and your toadyism like a she-snob! I blush when I think how the prince must have laughed at you—in his heart."

"I-I-I don't believe he did! And if he did, when I was trying my best to be kind and good and 'spectful to him—why-why he was more of a snob than I was! Wha-wha-what should I have called him? All princes are majesties and lordships and things, ain't they?"

"No; they are not. And you should have spoken to this one just as if he had been one of the country gentlemen of this neighborhood."

"Tre-tre-treat a prince as if he was a country gentleman!"

"Yes! Only a snob, and a very ignorant snob at that, would make any difference between one gentleman and another! Or, if you wish to act with very ceremonious politeness, you might address him as 'sir,' just simply 'sir.'"

"Ca-ca-call a born prince 'sir'!!!"

"Certainly; 'sir' is a prefix of sufficient politeness; quite good enough for an emperor, and not too good for a plowman!"

"Well, Cou-Cou-Countie, if you have said your say, please to go to bed. I-I-I shall follow my feelings, and if anybody laughs at my goo-goo-good intentions, it's them that are the snobs and not me," concluded the old lady, with more of quiet self-respect than was her meek habit.

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Even in the kitchen the servants sat up long after their usual hour of retirement to discuss the new arrival and the young married pair, whom they called and persisted in calling "Mr and Mrs. Prince."

The next morning, after breakfast, Prince Frederick requested a private interview between himself and wife and Miss Orkney.

And when the three were closeted together in the oak parlor, he said:

"I have already assured you that my fourteen months' absence and silence were quite involuntary on my part."

"And it is needless to say that we entirely accepted that theory," replied Ora.

"May I ask, then, what construction you placed upon that long absence and silence?"

"We feared that something had happened to you which had put it out of your power to return or write," said Ora.

"And you, Belvidera? What was your thought?" inquired Prince Frederick.

"Oh, I thought that letters had been lost or that you had been ill; or that your grandfather had broken our marriage," replied Bevvie, with a sigh and a smile, given to past sorrow and present delight.

"He could not have done so. Not even if he had been so disposed. The days for such high-handed despotism are past, and past forever! I would have come back to my wife, against all opposition—which could only have been made in words, you know. I should have returned to you in a month had I not been prevented."

"But what prevented you?" inquired Bevvie.

"Did it ever to you occur to think that shipwrecked was I?"

"No; it never did, for I knew that the Bevis, by

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which you sailed, arrived safe at Havre, with her list of passengers complete, your name being among them."

"My name there was, but not myself."

"Not yourself!" exclaimed Bevvie.

"No! I did not, after all, in the Bevis sail! But in the Osprey."

"In the sprey! The ill-fated Osprey, which has never since been heard of!" exclaimed Bevvie, turning pale.

"Yes, love, yes! Serene yourself, you! Here safe am I! I my passage relinquished on the Bevis for reasons which shall explained be, in due course. And two days later I the misfortune obtained to sail the Osprey by."

"But you are safe! Oh, you are safe! Thank Heaven! But how, then, were you saved?" anxiously inquired Bevvie.

"I will, in due course, tell you. But, gracious madam, I have a story to tell to make many things to be plain, if I have your permission to begin," said Prince Frederick, turning with a bow to Miss Orkney.

"We are only too anxious to hear your narrative, Prince," replied the young lady.

And Prince Frederick began his story, only falling into his German idioms of "cart before the horse" when he spoke in haste without taking time to reflect; while Ora and Bevvie listened with the greatest curiosity and deepest interest.

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CHAPTER XXXII

PRINCE FREDERICK'S STORY

"You are aware, gracious lady, that I am but the youngest son of the youngest son of my grandfather, and, therefore, of the least consequence in the family; but since my father was killed in the battle of Metz, and my mother died of grief while I was still but a boy, I grew to be the most indulged of my grandfather's progeny.

"Two years ago, I then having completed my collegiate studies and attained my twenty-first year, my grandfather sent me to travel, attended by the learned Rev. Dr. Antonides Van Broekhuizen, of Antwerp, as my tutor. We passed the summer and autumn in going over Europe, and even into the most easily accessible portions of Asia and Africa, but returned in time to celebrate Christmas in the fatherland. My tutor went to visit friends in Antwerp, and I to my grandfather.

"In the following April we—my tutor and myself—sailed for America. On the passage out Dr. Van Broekhuizen took a violent cold, which settled on his lungs, and in a few days ended in death.

"When he found his end approaching he sent for me to his bedside, asked me to close the door, and to receive his last instructions. When I had obeyed him he drew from under his pillow a Japan box or case, which he put into my hands, asking me to guard it safely, and then he explained it to me.

"With the distressing efforts of a dying man, gasping for breath, and amid frequent breaks and pauses, he told me the story of a crime that I must briefly tell you.

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"It was the crime of a woman to whose death-bed he was summoned during his last visit to Antwerp, and whose attested confession was locked, with other important documents, in the box he had given into my charge.

"This woman, who ended her life in the Royal Hospital at Antwerp, was, in her maidenhood, the favorite attendant of the young Baroness Von Engelstedt, the bride of one of the wealthiest bankers in Belgium. She left her mistress only to become the wife of Albert Vondel, one of the chief musicians of the Royal Theater.

"It happened about a year after the parting that the baroness and her late favorite waiting woman became mothers in the same week, each of a little daughter, the child of Vondel being but three days older than that of Madam Von Engelstedt.

"And as Vondel was a remarkably fine and healthy young woman, she was offered a high salary to become the foster-nurse of the little heiress.

"Tempted by that salary, she put her own child away from her bosom and received that of the baroness. And as soon as she was able to move, her home was to be in the nursery of the Palace Von Engelstedt.

"But, tempted by opportunity and the devil, she availed herself of the few days the little heiress was in her sole charge, and effected a change in the children, substituting her own child for that of the baroness, a fraud easily perpetrated while the children were but a few days old.

"It was her own child, then, that she took to the nursery of the palace and palmed off upon the unsuspicious and confiding household there.

"All went on well with the woman until, on one fatal

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day, her child—her own child—was seized with spasms and died in her arms.

"Great was the grief and disappointment in the baron's household, who believed their heiress to have been taken from them. The babe was buried with great honors, and the mother, the false foster-nurse, was dismissed with a large gratuity from her kind and sorrowing mistress.

"The woman Vondel returned home, full of grief for the loss of her child, remorse for her crime, and fear of discovery.

"She found her husband, the musician, preparing for a sudden voyage to the United States with an opera troupe who had engaged him to join them.

"He knew all about the death of the banker's supposed child. All Antwerp knew it. So he was not surprised to see his wife, but very much surprised to hear her sudden declaration that she should accompany him to America.

"Vondel, who was innocent of any participation in his wife's fraud, and therefore ignorant of the weight of grief, remorse and fear on her soul, would have been very glad to take her and 'her' child with him, but only feared that the latter was too young. 'With a babe only three weeks old,' he said, it was too early for either mother or child to start on a long sea voyage.

"But the woman was afraid to stay behind, and determined to go with her husband, and so the next day they sailed for Baltimore, and after a rapid voyage they reached port on the ninth day.

"Misfortune pursued the sinner.

"On the day of landing, one of the hottest days in August, her husband fell under a sunstroke and died in

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a few hours, without ever having recovered his consciousness.

"The widow Vondel was nearly maddened by an access of grief, remorse and terror. She believed that all these misfortunes—the sudden death of her child, and then that of her husband, had fallen upon her in retribution of her one great sin.

"But remorse is not repentance, and not amendment.

"Instead of taking the child of the baroness back to Antwerp, and confessing her sin and throwing herself upon the mercy of the wronged parents for forgiveness, she sought out and discovered an infant asylum—that attached to the Convent of the Annunciation—and consigned the infant of five weeks old to its 'sheltering arms.'

"She divided all the money she possessed and put one half of it in the shape of a bank bill in an envelope, and pinned it to the wrappings of the little 'Belvidera,' and so she left her, forever."

"Oh! oh!" cried Bevvie, shivering and covering her face with her hands.

"Yes, dearest, you know it now. Your name before you took mine was Belvidera Von Engelstedt. And you are the daughter and sole heiress of Baron Ludwig Von Engelstedt, whose name is known throughout the world as one of the richest bankers in it," said the prince.

"And—my—mother?" slowly murmured Belvidera, without uncovering her bowed face.

"She—has been in heaven these many years," said the prince, reverently bending his head. "But your father—though twenty years the senior of the young wife who has gone so long before him—your father is, as you divine, still living, though aged and most infirm."

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Ora, who had listened to this conversation and felt all its surprises, still kept her self-possession, unmoved.

"Now, my dearest," said the prince, "let me resume my narrative.

"This woman Vondel, having left you at the convent, joined the opera troupe as chorus singer, and traveled with them over the United States, in which they spent some years.

"From here she returned with them to Europe.

"After which she led a wandering and dissipated life, which brought her at length, two years ago, an incurable pauper invalid to the Royal Hospital at Antwerp.

"There, after lingering some months, she died. It was on her death-bed that she expressed a wish to see a minister of the Lutheran church, and the messenger sent to summon one found and brought to her Dr. Van Broekhuizen.

"To him she confessed her crime.

"He exhorted her to make the same confession under oath, in the presence of witnesses, before a magistrate.

"This, being very near death, and thus beyond the power of man's vengeance, she consented to do.

"Dr. Van Broekhuizen brought the magistrate and witnesses to her bedside.

"Her confession, with all the circumstances connected with the fraud in the changing of the children, and also a minute description of the child and the child's clothing, with the date of the week, month and year when it was left at the Convent of the Annunciation, in Maryland, United States of America, was taken down from her lips in writing, before witnesses, read aloud, sworn to, and signed before the magistrate, who affixed his seal.

"Then the doctor went and called at the Palace Von

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Engelstedt, and having solicited and obtained an interview with the baron, broke to him the strange news.

"The aged man received the story with amazement and incredulity; but he repaired with the doctor to the hospital, where, seated by the side of the dying woman, he obtained such convincing evidence of the truth of her statement that he could no longer doubt it.

"Vondel sank suddenly and expired even while he sat beside her, her death hastened, no doubt, by the excitement of the interview.

"It was then that the baron, on learning that the doctor was about to sail for the United States, intrusted him with the delicate task of seeking out and recovering the lost daughter.

"Such, my gracious lady and my beloved wife, was the story told me by my dying tutor, in the cabin of the Pommeranian, when we were within three days' sail of New York.

"I gave him the required promise to take his place and fulfil his mission.

"He died the next night.

"My first duty on landing was to write to his relatives in Antwerp and announce his death. My second was to have his remains embalmed and dispatched, with all his personal effects, to the same place and people.

"Then I went down to Baltimore, and found my way to the Convent of the Annunciation to make inquiries for the child that had been left there sixteen years before.

"I found, to my delight, in my interview with the mother superior, that Belvidera was living, that she had been adopted by a lady, and brought up and educated as a lady, and that she was now traveling in Canada with her benefactress and a party of friends.

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"I obtained the address of the party in Montreal and hastened on thither to find the long-lost pearl.

"Judge of my pleasure when I found at the St. Lawrence Hall a party of Virginians whom I had met at Rome twelve months before—Mr. Pendleton and his amiable family—and discovered further that the fairy I was seeking, and her gracious benefactress, were of their set.

"Mr. Pendleton presented me to you, gracious lady, and in your company found I the lost Rose of Engelstedt.

"Ah, how soon I learned to love her! To love her! That scarcely expresses it! I found in her my soul! I had not lived till I met her!"

The prince clasped the hand of his wife and gazed on her in silent admiration for a few moments.

Ora took that opportunity to speak for the first time.

"May I ask you, without offense, why you did not make your mission known to us—to my ward and myself, who were most interested in knowing it?" she inquired.

"Because such were not my instructions, gentle lady. Had my tutor lived, he being an aged clergyman would have claimed the young lady, in the name and by the authority of her father, and would have taken her back to Antwerp with him.

"He had all the necessary legal documents to empower him to do this.

"But these papers, made out in his name, gave me no authority in this case.

"All that I could do, and all that I was instructed by Dr. Broekhuizen to do, was to seek out the lost daughter, find her, if possible, identify her by the notes in my possession, and without giving any information to her

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or to any of her friends here, to write all particulars to Baron Von Engelstedt, and leave the matter entirely in his hands. All this I did, as I was pledged to do," said the prince.

"And a little more," said Miss Orkney, with a smile.

"Ah, gracious lady, you will reproach me with that! But I do not reproach myself! I cannot, when I look on the face of my wife and think of my son!" said the lover-husband, with radiant look.

Ora divined then that Bevvie had never told him of the awful despair to which his long absence and silence had reduced her, and the desperation to which this despair had at last driven her—to the very verge of madness and suicide.

If he had known all that, he must indeed have bitterly reproached himself for his rash act.

"I married my lady," he continued, "because I loved her so ardently—because I feared to lose her if I left her unmarried, and longed to secure her beyond the possibility of loss except by—death. I had some trouble to win her consent. It was only when I talked of our ensuing separation, when I should be obliged to return to Germany, that she yielded."

Here Bevvie put in her word, with a smile and a blush:

"I, too, was afraid of losing him. I feared, if he went away just so, we might be parted forever; but I thought if we were married, we should be sure to meet again. But then you were gone so long and we could hear nothing of you, I grew to believe that even our marriage had not insured our reunion."

"Ah, love, love, it was a long, long trial!" said the prince, sighing.

"I do not wonder that you gained Bevvie's consent to

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a secret marriage. She was so young, and the circumstances so dazzling to a youthful fancy. But I do wonder that you could ever have persuaded a venerable clergyman to perform the ceremony for you," said Ora.

The prince smiled and said:

"I do not think that Father Muller ever would have married us had I not assured him that if he should refuse I should take my love across the border into the States, where at last we might be made one by a magistrate. The reverend father could not endure the thought of such sacrilege as that, and so he consented—choosing for us the least of two evils, he was good enough to say."

"You and Bevvie kept your secret well, prince. I never suspected it," said Ora.

"Ah, but it was a burden to her. It was a burden on her conscience to keep it from you!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE VOYAGE

"When the sorrowful day of our separation came at length, and we parted, with renewed vows of eternal love, oh, then, in that trying hour, as a last concession, I consented that she should share our secret with you. Then I left her, promising, intending and expecting to return to her before Christmas, or, at the latest, soon after the new year. This parting, as you are now aware, took place in Richmond during the last days of October."

"I remember," said Ora.

"I reached New York on the night of All-Hallow

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Eve, the day before the sailing of the Bevis, on which I had secured passages for myself and valet, and which was advertised to leave at noon on the first of November."

"Oh, yes! And how I watched the papers on account of that steamer!" said Bevvie.

"The next morning my luggage was sent to the Bevis, and at eleven o'clock, attended only by my valet, I embarked."

"I—I—I understood you to say that you did not sail on the Bevis," faltered Bevvie, in perplexity.

"Nor did I—very far, my dear. I embarked on the Bevis, but when we were a few miles out I discovered, to my great dismay, that I had left the case containing all the important papers relating to Belvidera on the writing table in my room at the hotel in New York.

"In despair, I cast about in my mind to see what could possibly be done under the circumstances.

"Then I thought of the pilot boat, and saw that the best thing would be to send my valet back by the returning pilot boat to secure the case and bring it by the next steamer, which was gazetted to sail in three days, to the fatherland after me.

"Then I saw that it would not be safe to intrust so valuable a parcel out of my own possession and in the hands of a servant for so long a time. And I determined to return in the pilot boat myself to recover my precious papers.

"So, leaving my valet in charge of all my effects on board the Bevis, with orders to take care of everything during the voyage, and when he should land at Havre to go to Hotel de l'Europe and wait there for the arrival of the Osprey, by which I intended to follow."

"The ill-starred Osprey!" breathed Ora.

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"I returned on Number 7 and sought out my hotel. I found my case safe in the custody of the hotel people. I spent that day in writing a long letter to my dear wife."

"A letter which I never received," sighed Bevvie.

"Ah, no! By some one's criminal carelessness. But that is past now, my dear, and all is well. To go on: The next day I spent in looking up a new valet, through the columns of the advertising sheets, and then through various addresses. I interviewed twenty before I found one to suit, in—whom do you think?" he inquired.

The two ladies shook their heads with smiles and "ask us something easier" airs.

"In a poor young German student who had come to America to seek his fortune, and had found only misfortune, and who, out of money, out of health, and out of hope, was actually earning his bread as a waiter in a restaurant while waiting for an opportunity to return to the fatherland as private secretary, valet, or anything honest, to some gentleman going thither, and for whom he was advertising."

"I fear there are many such cases in New York and other large seaports of the United States," said Ora.

"Poor fellow! I was glad to give him the opportunity he sought. Glad at the time, I mean. Not glad afterward, for he was lost in the Osprey."

"Ah!" cried Ora and Bevvie in a breath.

"Yes; it was very sad. Let us not think of it this happy day. I took one good precaution before we embarked again. I procured a small waterproof bag, in which I placed all my Belvidera's vouchers, and which I hung around my neck, next my bosom, so that I should never forget or lose them while I retained life. It was to that precaution that I owe their preservation now;

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for that bag of papers was the only thing of mine saved from the wreck."

"And would Bevvie's identification and inheritance have been endangered by their loss?" inquired Ora.

"Undoubtedly. To go on: On the morning of the third day, having provided myself with a new portmanteau, a few books, changes of clothing, and other small essentials for comfort during the voyage, I and my unlucky valet embarked on the Osprey and once more sailed for Havre."

A deep sigh from Bevvie.

"Our voyage was pleasant and prosperous until we reached the Banks of Newfoundland, when, the month being November, the weather became extremely cold and stormy. The fogs were thick; our progress very slow. There were days when the decks and all the rigging were covered thick with snow and ice. Even at noonday we could not see a hand's length before us."

Bevvie shivered.

"The catastrophe came one night, in the dead of night. All the passengers were in their berths. I was sound asleep in mine, when I was suddenly startled, shocked, by a tremendous crash that threw me out of my berth, while the war of winds and waves, and the hurried steps and oaths of men, the shrieks of women and children, told the tragic story too quickly and unmistakably. It was all over in a few minutes. Before I could even struggle through the overwhelming darkness and confusion of howling winds, rushing waves, crashing timbers, striving men and shrieking women, we were suddenly submerged, and every soul was struggling for life in a sea of broken ice, in the blackness of night. Amid the shrieks and groans, the prayers and

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maledictions, of the drowning and the maddening, I died—to consciousness, at least."

Bevvie uttered a low cry and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh! Heaven help me, had I known it at the time!" she gasped, and shuddered, clasping and unclasping her fingers in an excess of nervous agitation.

"I am glad you did not know it, gentle lady mine. For though they say the worst certainty is better than suspense, yet I think that your suspense was more tolerable than the certainty of that shipwreck amid night and storm and ice and snow would have been.

"When I came to life again, which seemed to my apprehension only the very next instant, for all the intermediate time was annihilated to me, I found myself in a warm and comfortable berth in a spacious cabin.

"It was daylight, and rough but kindly men were about me. One of them, seeing me awake, came and put to my lips their universal medicine—a glass of rum—carefully supporting my head with his left arm, while he administered the remedy with his right hand.

"To my questions, a little later on, he answered that I had been picked up insensible on a floating spar, to which the mere action of the waves had wrapped me by a torn and ragged sail. To all human ken all the rest of the crew and passengers of the Osprey seemed to have perished."

"Only you were saved!" breathed Bevvie, pale with awe.

"Only I! And, oh, my love, but for the memory and thought of you, I should have felt that it was selfish and hard-hearted to rejoice that I was saved."

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CHAPTER XXXIV

STORM-TOSSED

Be strong, oh, heart, to bear;
Nothing is vain;
Work on, though life is care
And grief and pain;
Heaven is above, and there
Rest will remain.—A. A. Proctor.

There is a voice—a still, small voice,
That comes when the storm is past;
It bids the sufferer's heart rejoice
In the haven of peace at last!
It tells of joys beyond the grave
And of Him who died a world to save.
—K. A. Ware.

The prince continued his narrative:

"My senses were soon again closed to all consciousness of external life. One cannot be tossed about for I know not how many hours in an icy sea without severe results, even if he escape with his life."

"Oh, no indeed! The wonder is that you were not frozen to death!" exclaimed the shuddering wife.

"I had a very long illness, love, and a very tedious convalescence.

"It was many weeks after the night of the shipwreck, and we were in much warmer latitudes, on the coast of South America, when I recovered sufficiently to understand my situation and surroundings.

"I learned that I had been picked up by the Royal

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Louise, a merchant ship bound from Glasgow to San Francisco, who had herself been tempest-driven far out of her course when she made the scene of the wrecked Osprey.

"I will not weary you with any details of our very monotonous voyage down the east coast of South America, but merely tell you that as we neared Cape Horn, that fierce battle ground around which the two great oceans meet and rage, we encountered very bad weather.

"I suppose that it very seldom happens, even in this world of accidents, that a man suffers shipwreck twice in one half year—twice between shore and shore.

"Yet such had nearly been my fate.

"Our ship had succeeded in doubling the cape—alive but in such a crippled condition that we had scarcely any hope of ever reaching port.

"We should probably have all gone to the bottom had we not been picked up by another ship, the Albatross, of Liverpool, homeward bound from Honolulu.

"By the Albatross, after another long and monotonous voyage, I reached Liverpool, whence immediately (after having written to you) I took ship to Ostend and made haste to Schloss Hohenfels.

"That was the 20th of November, just five weeks ago; my arrival overdue just one year.

"I found my aged grandfather dying, slowly, peacefully, of simple old age, experiencing a real euthanasia.

"He seemed pleased but not surprised to see me. He seemed indeed never to have missed me, or to have taken any account of my long absence. This was the 'Time of peace,' as the poet calls it.

"All this I could easily understand from the number of his years—near ninety.

"But what perplexed me exceedingly was that none

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of my friends exhibited the slightest interest in my long, unexplained absence or unexpected return! I might have been a ghost whom they could not see, for all hearty recognition I received.

"Later on I heard the reason for all this. It was because of the prevailing opinion that I had been an ungrateful and neglectful son to my aged grandsire; that I had married a fabulously wealthy *parvenu* in the United States and spent my time in traveling, at the expense of my golden bride; that I had ignored all the letters which had been written to me, telling me of my grandfather's declining life.

"Still later on I got to the foundation of these stories.

"The announcement of my fabulous marriage, with full description of the wedding ceremony and wedding breakfast, had appeared in the leading American papers, had been copied in the leading European journals, and had so 'established the fact beyond the possibility of doubt.'

"Of course I told the story of my shipwreck, rescue, and compulsory voyage half around the globe. This set me right with my world; but set them wondering with me as to who could have been masquerading in my name and rank. I had a suspicion, which I forbore to mention then.

"Then I made inquiries for my valet, but no one had heard of him. I wrote to the Hotel de l'Europe at Havre to inquire for Hans Veldt, who had landed from the Bevis and waited there for the arrival of the Osprey from New York, a year ago. But the proprietors remembered nothing about him. I should have gone immediately in person in quest of the missing man, but that my grandfather's end was said by his physicians to be very near.

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"In fact, his pulse scarcely beat. He slept most of the time; only waked up when roused to have his toilet attended to, or to take necessary food or drink.

"He always woke with a smile, enjoyed his bath, his fresh clothes, and his light nourishment, laughed when he heard distant voices in their merry talk, looked around with calm content upon the sunshiny world, and then relapsed into peaceful sleep again.

"But old and weak as he was, near death as he lay, I felt still constrained to confess my secret marriage, and ask his forgiveness and his blessing.

"I made my own opportunity.

"It was my privilege to watch beside his easy chair for a few hours every day.

"During one of the last of these watches I sent the nurse out of his chamber, and gently awakened him. The doctors all agreed that it was best for him to be awakened and spoken to at intervals during both day and night. And for the rest, I was not afraid of exciting him by my news. Nothing could excite him now. His was 'The time of peace.'

"So I gently awakened him, and said that I had something to tell him. He smiled.

"Then I told him that I had married the only daughter and heiress of the Baron Von Engelstedt, and asked him to forgive me for having taken this step without his knowledge.

"He smiled again, faintly.

"I begged him to pardon me, and to bless me.

"I know not whether he fully understood about my marriage when he said it was 'good—very good;' but I know that he knew what he was doing when he blessed me—blessed me with a full heart, laying his wasted,

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shadowy hand upon my head, and calling me his dear Fritz, youngest son of his youngest son.

"Still, in view of his physical and his mental condition, I felt very like Jacob stealing his dying father's benediction.

"The next day my grandfather passed away.

"After the funeral I hurried to Havre to make inquiries about my missing valet. After some time I succeeded in causing the hotel servants to remember the man who, twelve months before, had arrived in the steamship Bevis from New York, and waited there for his master, who was expected by the Osprey.

"The man had waited until the wreck of the Osprey was reported, and had then gone on to Paris. Since that they had all lost sight of him.

"I had my own suspicions as to the course of my ex-valet, but kept them to myself. For the present I had no time to pursue my investigations farther. I had to hurry to Antwerp to see my, as yet, unsuspecting father-in-law, the Baron Von Engelstedt."

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CHAPTER XXXV

THE BARON VON ENGELSTEDT

If thou shalt be in heart a child,
Forgiving, tender, meek and mild,
Though with light stains of earth defiled,
  Oh, soul, it shall be well with thee!

Not where, nor how, nor when we know;
Nor by what stages thou shalt grow;
We may but whisper faint and low,
  It shall be surely well.

It shall be well with thee, oh, soul!
Though the heavens wither like a scroll,
Though sun and moon forget to roll,
  Oh, soul, it shall be well!—LEWIS MORRIS.

"I REACHED Antwerp in the dawn of a dreary winter day—the first of December.

"After a bath and breakfast at the hotel St. Antoine de la Paix, I repaired to the Maison Von Engelstedt and sent up my card to the baron.

"I was soon admitted to his presence, where he sat in a large resting chair, beside a reading table, in his well appointed library.

"Ah, in him I found another depressing spectacle of an aged and infirm man, wrapped in a furred dressing gown, and with bald head covered by a velvet cap.

"Yet he was not so far gone as my grandfather had been before his death. The baron was in full possession of his mental faculties.

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"He arose on my entrance, and received me courteously. His first words, after the usual greetings had passed between us, were earnest expressions of condolence with me for the loss of my grandfather.

" 'He was like your own father. You scarcely knew any other,' he said, 'but the grand-duke—very aged—twenty years my senior,' he added, with comfortable complacency.

" 'My grandfather was ninety-five, Herr Baron,' I answered.

" 'Ah! I shall scarcely reach so patriarchal an age. But you come to tell me of my daughter. In your letter from Hohenfels announcing your visit to me, you said that she was well when you saw her last, and that you had something to communicate in regard to her which you must reserve for a personal interview.'

" 'Yes, Herr Baron,' I answered, beginning to feel embarrassed at thought of the confession I had to make to this unsuspecting father.

"He saw my disturbance, and grew uneasy.

" 'My daughter was—well placed—in the care of—noble ladies—I judged from your letter,' he said hesitatingly.

" 'Yes, Herr Baron; my very first letters from Canada must have assured you of that. Your daughter was the adopted child of a lady of the highest position, a great land-holder, whose rank would entitle her to that of a princess were that the custom of her country,' I answered, weakly putting off the trying moment of confession.

" 'Ah, yes! Heaven be praised! But why are you so disturbed, prince? What is it? What have you yet to tell me? You said that she was well? You said that she was in good hands, I think.'

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" 'She was in excellent health and in unexceptionable guardianship with the good friends of her childhood and youth when I saw her last,' I replied.

" 'And how long ago was that? A few weeks? a month?' he inquired.

" 'Longer than that,' I answered.

"And then I explained by telling the baron all that he ought to have heard—telling him cautiously and tenderly, on account of his age.

"I began by recapitulating all that I had already told him, in my first letters to him from America—namely, of the death at sea of the Rev. Dr. Van Broekhuizen, my tutor, to whom he had intrusted the delicate mission of seeking out his own lost daughter; and of the dying request of the old man when he placed certain invaluable documents in my hands.

"Next I told him of my successful search for his lost daughter, ending in my discovery of her in the charge of such eligible friends.

" 'And all this you told me a year ago by a letter, prince,' he said. 'Where is my daughter now?'

" 'With the same excellent friends,' I answered.

" 'And why have I not heard from her or from you for so long?' he inquired.

"Then I told him all! I confessed my love for his daughter, that strong love that had tempted me to lure her into a secret marriage.

"The old man's wrath was very great and scarcely to be restrained by etiquette or courtesy.

"I divined at once that his anger was kindled by the doubt he entertained of the legality and stability of such a marriage; and, feeling the justice of his resentment against me from his point of view, and knowing the

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honesty of my own intentions, I neither lost temper nor self-possession.

"I told him that my grandfather had looked upon my marriage with more favor, and had approved it with almost his last words.

"This surprised and pleased the baron so much that his wrath subsided immediately; and he expressed a hope that though the marriage had been a hasty and ill-considered one, all legal and religious forms had been carefully and conscientiously observed.

"In reply to these words, I took the oilskin bag from my bosom—that bag of precious documents which of all my personal effects had alone survived the wreck of the Osprey—and drawing from the papers an attested copy of my marriage, I placed it in his hands.

"That, taken with the fact of my grandfather's consent, as reported by me, quite satisfied him.

"But he asked me again why I had been silent so long. Why I had left him in such dread suspense.

"Then I told him how a year ago, soon after my marriage, I had sailed in the Bevis for Havre, intending then to see him and tell him all, but that I had missed the important casket intrusted to me by the departed doctor, and had gone back to port in the pilot boat to find it.

"How after recovering it I had sailed in the Osprey, and had been wrecked off the coast of Newfoundland, and had been rescued and been taken around Cape Horn, and so on and so on, just as I told the people at home and just as I have told you, gracious lady, and dear wife.

"And when I had finished my own narrative, I could not forbear saying:

" 'But you, baron? Is it not strange that in this year

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of silence and suspense, you have not sent out other emissaries to gain news of your daughter?'

"'I have sent out confidential agents, but without gaining any satisfactory information.

"'After waiting weeks to hear from you, and failing to do so, I wrote; then waited more weeks for an answer to my letter, and failing to get one, I wrote again and again.

"'Then a rumor reached me that you had married the heiress of a silver mine and had gone on a long tour,' said the baron.

"'Some one, masquerading under my name and title while I was missing, must have so married. Well, baron, letters having failed, you dispatched messengers?' I queried.

"'Yes, in March I sent an agent over. He spent two months in a vain search.

"'He went first to the Convent of the Annunciation, and was told that the young lady for whom he inquired was still under the protection of her lady friends, and had gone north for an extensive tour. He could get no address.

"'In August I sent out another, who was equally unsuccessful.

"'In October I sent out a third, who is now pursuing the search in America. Thank Heaven, that is now unnecessary.

"'But you, prince. Did you tell my daughter the story of her parentage and of her abduction?' inquired the baron.

"'No, baron; I had no authority to betray that secret,' I replied.

"'You had no authority to marry the lady, young sir, yet you did it,' said the old gentleman tartly.

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" 'Forgive me, Herr Baron, as my grandfather has forgiven me, and consider also that I was under no pledge not to marry my love, as I was not to speak prematurely of her birth and rank,' I answered deprecatingly.

"The baron was mollified by my humility, and he graciously forgave me."

"For making his poor daughter a princess," put in Bevvie.

The prince turned and smiled on her; but without directly answering her remark, he continued his narrative:

"The baron forgave me, and after having investigated the whole affair with more coolness and deliberation, he heartily approved and accepted me as his son-in-law, and commissioned me to return to the United States.

"One week later, on the 8th of December, I sailed from Havre for New York. I reached port on the evening of the 18th. I wrote a hasty letter to the old address, hoping that it might possibly find you, my wife.

"Then I took the night express to the city of Washington, arrived the next morning, and took the day express to Richmond to seek out the Pendletons, whose permanent residence I knew to be in that city, and from whom I wished to ascertain your present abode.

"I had no difficulty in finding a family so distinguished. They welcomed me with warm hospitality. At their house I found the Herr Conrad Orkney, the betrothed of the gracious lady.

"I told them all the whole truth concerning the parentage and the marriage of my betrothed. They listened with indulgence and sympathy, and gave me the address of the gracious lady with whom my wife was still tarrying.

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"The Herr Conrad Orkney, the happy betrothed of the dear fraulein, offered to be my escort to Hall-in-Umbra, to which he was going down immediately for his marriage.

"I gratefully accepted his company, announced my approach by telegraph from the station, and set out by express train for Lower Umbra. We arived at noon yesterday. We found your carriage waiting. But I am running into telling you what you already know. Gracious lady! Dear wife! My defense is closed!" said the prince, lifting the hand of Ora to his lips and then kissing Bevvie.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THAT MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE

By and by the evening falls,
  Sons of labor rest:
Weary cattle seek the stalls,
  Birds are on their nest.

By and by the tide will turn,
  Change come o'er the sky,
Life's hard task the child will learn
  By and by.

By and by the din will cease,
  Day's long hours be past;
By and by in holy peace
  We shall sleep at last.—ANONYMOUS.

"ONE question more, prince," said Miss Orkney.

"Yes, dear lady!"

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"Have you ever discovered who it was that so dexterously and successfully assumed your name and rank, and married Miss Bullyon—for that was the name of the deceived and misguided heiress—have you?"

"You knew the unfortunate lady, then?" inquired the prince.

"Not at all! But, of course, I read all about the marriage in the papers the next morning, for we were in New York at the time. And more than that, we happened to see the wedding."

"To see the wedding!" involuntarily echoed the prince in his surprise—"that wedding?"

"Yes—at least Bevvie and myself saw the great crowd at the church, and Bevvie saw the bridegroom and the bride in their carriage," laughed Miss Orkney.

"Ora! Ora! oh, what is this? I dreamed—I dreamed—you know! When I was so ill in New York last summer! Oh, Ora!" gasped Bevvie, turning pale and trembling with emotion.

Prince Frederick looked from one to the other of his companions in much perplexity.

"To what illness does my wife allude, gracious lady?" he at length inquired.

"I must explain," said Ora. "Last summer, on our way from Montreal to Washington City, we stopped at New York for a day's rest, as Bevvie was not strong. On the morning after our arrival in the city, we set out for a drive through Central Park. Ae we drove along Madison Avenue, when we had got far up town we were stopped by a great crowd of carriages, before a very magnificent church. I thought it was a funeral. But it proved to be a wedding! Oh! a very grand wedding indeed, as our Ethiopian coachman explained to us—'a great lord, or king, or pope,' or something, was going

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to marry the great Mr. Bullyon's daughter and heiress. While he spoke an audible murmur ran through the crowd that the bridegroom and the bride were coming out of the church. I bent forward to get a glimpse of the distinguished pair, but before I could do so a loud scream from Belvidera startled me. I turned quickly and saw that she had fainted, and fallen back in her seat. She lay like she was dead——"

"Oh, Fred!" interrupted Bevvie, "I thought he was you. Indeed, indeed I did! He looked like you—just like you! Why, he had even your little curl of hair wandering down the middle of the forehead, and your peculiar twirl of the mustache at the corners of the upper lip, and even the little, tiny black mole over the left eyebrow."

"All these were parts of his make-up to personate me," laughed the prince.

"And he wore the same military dress that you sometimes did."

"It was, probably, the very same, my dear wife. It was, probably, my lieutenant's uniform of the imperial guards."

"And—and—the breast of his coat was all covered with orders and decorations! Stars and garters! How many he had!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Frederick of Hohenfels. "There is where, like other impostors, he overdressed his part. My love, I have not a decoration of any sort in this world. Not even the least little order of merit. My worthy counterfeit probably purchased his from some theatrical costumer. What ability he displayed! His talents were worthy of a higher and longer career."

"How can you jest?" inquired Bevvie. "I thought he was you. It seemed as if I had been shot through

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the heart by the sight. It seemed my death blow. I fell senseless and knew no more for many hours. I don't know how many hours, for I was deceived by my own self, and when I woke up I thought it was all a dream, and no one told me anything else."

The prince turned inquiringly toward Miss Orkney.

"Yes, I must explain," said Ora. "Bevvie's swoon was no ordinary hysterical fainting fit. She had suffered a tremendous nervous shock, and had fallen into a deep and death-like swoon that lasted several hours. We drove to a drug store and tried every means to recover her, but in vain. Then we took her home, put her to bed, and sent for a doctor. But with the best medical help it was near morning before she recovered consciousness, and then only for a few minutes, and under the influence of an opiate she fell asleep. When at last she awoke in the morning—but I am getting ahead too fast. I must tell you first that before she recovered consciousness I had learned, by the chatter at the hotel, that the grand wedding we had seen was that of Prince Frederick of Hohenfels with Miss Bullyon, the great heiress. And I sent for all the morning papers the next day to ascertain the truth. In the first one I opened there was a long and glowing account of this sumptuousness—the 'princely wedding,' it was called. And there seemed no mistake about it. There it was in print. Prince Frederick of Hohenfels the bridegroom! Then I understood the cause of Bevvie's swoon. I knew that she had recognized, or believed she had recognized, her own husband in the bridegroom of Miss Bullyon."

"And you thought I could be guilty of such a crime!" exclaimed the prince.

"No; I did not think so. But my mind was in a

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state of warfare, between my faith on your honor on the one side and the evidence of my senses on the other. In the midst of all this Bevvie awoke—awoke peacefully in the familiar hotel room, and—only thought that she had had a very bad dream!"

"Yes," added the little lady; "when I awoke and saw everything around me looking so natural, so ordinary, I thought that it was the first morning after our arrival at that hotel, and that all the strange, improbable episode of the day before had been—nightmare! But, you see, I had been so completely unconscious in the interval."

"I did not contradict her; of course I left her to believe in her dream. I wrote to the Rev. Dr. Muller; but got no satisfaction except this, that he agreed with me in having faith in you, notwithstanding appearances."

"And to think my 'nightmare' was no dream, after all, but an action that passed before my waking eyes!" mused Bevvie.

"This reminds me that we must return to 'the previous question,' and ask you, prince, if you have yet discovered who impersonated you on the occasion of that wedding?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"My excellent valet, of course! I had suspected him from the first. The fellow was of my own size and complexion. His features were not very unlike my own, and—from my wife's description of the curl on the forehead and the twirl on the upper lip—he must have increased the likeness by his arrangement of hair and mustache. It was also in favor of his imposture that I had never entered New York social circles."

"I hope the man is in the hands of justice!" exclaimed Miss Orkney.

"Not yet, I fear. As I said, I had suspected him

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from the first. Before I left Hohenfels for Antwerp I had written and put detectives on his track at Havre and at Paris. They had cabled to their correspondents in the principal American cities East and West. The man and his dupe were last heard from on the Pacific slope. But his speedy arrest is inevitable."

"What an artful, unscrupulous monster he must have been!" exclaimed Bevvie.

Prince Frederick laughed at her vehemence, then said:

"The opportunity was so fine! The temptation so great! He was waiting there at Havre for the arrival of the Osprey, with his master on board. After a while he heard of the wreck of the Osprey, with the loss of all on board—his master, as he must have supposed, among the rest—while his master's name was on the passenger list of the Bevis, by which he was to have sailed for Havre, but did not. Now his master was lost, as the valet supposed, while the world believed him still living. The valet had all his master's papers—correspondence, letters of credit, passports, introductions, jewels, wardrobe—everything, in a word, to identify him as Frederick of Hohenfels, in strange cities. So he first went to Paris, then to Rome, to St. Petersburg, to London, where he succeeded in dishonoring the name he had taken."

"Is it not strange that he was not detected in these European cities, which you had visited in person before?" inquired Ora.

"No; for when I was traveling with my tutor, I entered into no society. I was studying and visiting public libraries and other public institutions. And the man who had made himself up so artfully to represent me rather affected gambling saloons and other disreputable

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haunts. Finally he went to New York and married the golden heiress. He will probably end his brilliant career in the seclusion of some penitentiary."

"And this is all?" said Miss Orkney.

"All," responded the prince, "except my endless thanks to you, gracious lady, for all that you have done and suffered in my dear wife's cause. Early in January, we shall sail for Havre and Antwerp."

"Where you will make your home?"

"For the present, yes. But in the not distant future my dream is to purchase a large tract of land on the Pacific slope—a tract about ten times as large as my uncle's little grand duchy, and large enough to be a refuge and a livelihood to all the grand and little dukes and all the princes and princelings—when the revolutionists shall have had their way, as they certainly will have it, sooner or later."

"You are a revolutionist, then, prince?" inquired Miss Orkney.

He paused before he answered, and then said:

"If to believe in republics is to be a revolutionist, then I am one. But I would rather the change should come peacefully by reform than violently by revolution."

"Yes! Yes!" earnestly assented Miss Orkney. The talk was at an end.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

WEDDING FAVORS

Every wedding, says the proverb,
  Makes another, soon or late;
Never yet was any marriage
  Entered on the book of fate,
But the names were also written
  Of the patient pair that wait.

While the priest fulfilled his office,
  Still the ground the lovers eyed,
And the parents and the kinsmen
  Aimed their glances at the bride;
But the groomsmen eyed the maidens
  Who were waiting at her side.

—T. W. Parsons.

Bevvie caught a glimpse of her baby, well wrapped up in its swan's down cloak and hood, crowing in its nurse's arms outside the window; and she started up and ran out into the hall to call Rachel to bring the child in.

The young father arose, bowed to Miss Orkney and followed his wife.

Bevvie had taken the crowing infant in her arms.

"He can never by any chance become grand-duke of Hohenfels, but he is born in the United States and he may some day become the president of——"

"A humane society, or a literary club, or even of a savings bank, but not of the United States! Not in

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these days!" hastily added Ora, who had just left the oak parlor, on her way up stairs.

On that afternoon Ora's prophecy in regard to the delayed letters and telegram was fulfilled.

Mr. Goodwin arrived on a visit to the hall, bringing with him all the letters from the Lower Umbra post office, as he often, or rather always, did whenever he happened to find them before the arrival of Miss Orkney's messenger.

All the guests were in their rooms getting ready for dinner.

So Ora was alone when she welcomed her new visitor.

"I have brought you a bundle of letters," said the old man, drawing a parcel from his capacious pocket. "Some of them are foreign, from some place in Germany, and have followed you all over the country, I should think, for they are covered with post marks and queer stamps. I should not wonder if they came from Bevvie's missing husband, you know!"

"I think it very likely," replied Ora, with a smile; but she gave no explanation just then.

"Now don't stand on ceremony with me. Read your own letters, and send Bevvie's to her. And here is what I should have given you before, only they are such shocking things, are telegrams," pursued the squire, as he slowly drew from his vest the little official envelope that has carried such varied news of joy and woe to so many hearts and homes.

"The only telegram we expect is a good one. Never fear, squire," replied Ora, as she beckoned Old Charley from the hall, and gave him the thin official envelope and three letters to take up to Bevvie, their proper owner.

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When the man had left the room, Ora told the squire of Prince Frederick's sudden arrival with Conrad Orkney the evening previous.

The old man was jubilant, even boyish, in his sympathy with the happiness of his young friends, and he joyfully accepted Ora's invitation to stay to dinner and form the acquaintance of the young German.

A few minutes later Frederick of Hohenfels entered the drawing room, and was presented in due form to the squire.

And the old and the young man must have fallen in love with each other at first sight, so soon did they affiliate.

And presently, when the circle was joined by the ladies and Conrad Orkney, much amusement was given by the discussion of the delayed letters and telegram, and much ironical praise bestowed on the great value of country post and telegraph offices, until dinner was announced.

Mr. Goodwin not only stayed to dinner, but he stayed to a late supper, and then rode home by the moonlight.

And on this second evening of the young German's visit, both the old ladies, Mrs. Mossop and Miss Orkney, finding Frederick of Hohenfels so very much like other young gentlemen, grew quite at ease in his company, and happily forgot to miscall him by titles to which he had no right.

"There will be a Christmas service at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, at the Lower Umbra church. Of course we must attend, and we should be most happy to have your company, prince. But should you prefer to go with us if to do so you must, like us, breakfast at seven o'clock?" inquired Miss Orkney, just before the party were about to separate on Christmas Eve at night.

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"Gracious lady, yes; with pleasure and with thanks. As to the hour, I have from childhood been trained to early habits. Why, at your great hotels I very nearly famished between my daily rising and the earliest hour at which I could get even a cup of coffee. We Hohenfels hold that 'the sun was made to rule the day,' and we do not sleep after he has risen," gayly replied the prince.

"Then I am very glad that you are to be of our party," said Miss Orkney.

And with many merry wagers as to who should rise earliest in the morning, the young friends bade each other a laughing good night.

"'Good night,' indeed!" exclaimed Miss Constantia Orkney, as the hall door closed upon the last departing guests, whose carriage they had watched out of sight into the woods—"good night! I think it should be good morning! The moon was made to rule the night, and the moon has been set for hours! And the sun was made to rule the day, and the sun is up! I hold it to be a sin to reverse the laws of nature, by turning night into day and day into night, in this reckless and remorseless manner!"

"Lor-lor-lord-a messy—'pon my soul, Countie, what are you a-talk-talk-talking about?" demanded Mrs. Mossop. "Young people must dance and 'joy themselves, you know!"

"Don't you talk, Marcia! You are not young; you hadn't that excuse. And you danced every alternate set all the evening. I was ashamed of you! At your age, too!"

"Goo-goo-goodness alive, Countie! What's age got to do with it? Ef your long legs is too stiff to dance, that's no-no-no reason why mine mustn't, if they feel like it,

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and they did feel like it, I can tell you that!" retorted the widow.

"Your limbs will be stiff enough and sore enough to-morrow, I can tell you that, at your age!" said Miss Countie.

"Now-now-now just listen to her! Heaving my age into my teeth! Look here, Countie! My age is only skin deep! So there, now! And I'm going to dance 'long o' the young folks every time I get a chance, if I feel like it. So there, now!" concluded Mrs. Mossop, as she walked up stairs—a little stiffly and wearily, it must be said.

And, oh dear; she did not come down again that live-long day! But then, neither did Miss Countie, nor Bevvie.

Dinner was served at the usual hour, but no one came to the table except the young mistress of the house, who was obliged to appear, and the two gentlemen.

The whole family did not reassemble, in fact, until the next morning at the breakfast table; and even then the "gay and festive" old widow was stiffer in the limbs than she would ever have acknowledged.

But Miss Countie discovered her sister's infirmity, and whispered viciously something to the effect that

"Dancing bears
Must pay for their airs."

To which Mrs. Mossop replied that the dance was worth every dollar of the price.

The Christmas week was an unusually festive one, even for that neighborhood. The hard-frozen snow covered the ground, and the moonlight nights favored evening parties even in that country, where the farms lay at considerable distances from each other.

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Invitations came pouring in upon the family and guests at Hall-in-Umbra, for dinners, dances, and masquerades, for every day and night in the week, except Sunday, the blessed day of rest, even from pleasure.

And every one of these invitations had to be accepted or offense had to be given.

Luckily the weather continued to be cold and clear, and the sleighing excellent.

So, on the second day after their surprise party, which had lasted all night and laid them all up, the Orkneys and their guests set forth in two handsome sleighs furnished with heavy furs and drawn by fine horses, to dine with the Arlingtons at their pleasant farmhouse the Oaks, where they finished up the day with a dance, and whence they returned by moonlight at midnight.

On the evening of the third day they went to Colville Creek House, the home of the Colvilles, to a masquerade, and made a night of it, returning only after an early breakfast the next morning.

On that, the fourth day after Christmas, they dined at Fennel Hall with the Farnsworths, and as that was Saturday, they returned early in the evening to be ready for the Sabbath.

"Ora," said Bevvie, as they bade each other good night before retiring, "I am glad to-morrow is Sunday! I am really grateful that there is one day in seven in which we are obliged to rest, even from 'enjoyment' (?) —for I am just about worn out."

"Yes, my dear; I know you are, and so are we all. But Bevvie, love, you have given so much gratification to our neighbors. You have given them so much to talk of, not to say to boast of, for the rest of their lives," replied Ora, quite seriously.

"But how? In what way?" questioned the little lady.

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"Oh, child! Don't you know that all the events of their career will henceforth be dated—so long before or so long after 'the prince dined' or 'supped' or 'danced' with them? We republicans are such king worshipers, Bevvie," concluded Miss Orkney, as she kissed her little friend and let her go to rest.

On Sunday the whole party from Hall-in-Umbra went to church and found refreshment in the services.

But on Monday the festivities recommenced. More invitations poured in upon the Orkneys and their guests, for every day and night in the week—for dinner parties, dancing parties, and so forth. All these, with one exception, were really obliged to be declined; because the marriage of Conrad and Oresta Orkney was to take place the first week in January, and the family at Hall-in-Umbra were busily engaged in preparing for it.

The one exception mentioned was made in favor of the Goodwins, whose invitations could not be refused upon any possible pretext, and who gave an evening party on the night of New Year's Day, that for real enjoyment excelled all that had been given by any of the country neighbors during their Christmas holidays.

The good old squire possessed the secret of entertaining delightfully, and his five flower daughters had inherited the gift from him.

All the circle at Hall-in-Umbra went to Welcoming on that auspicious occasion, danced until midnight, then supped, danced till sunrise, then breakfasted and returned home to recuperate.

"It is a sin!" said Miss Countie. "It is a sin so to waste time, money, and health."

"And so it would be, auntie, if we kept it up! but we do not! It is only these few days of the Christmas holidays that we frolic so much! And we make up for

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it by being very steady and domestic all the rest of the year," said Ora, apologetically.

"If-if-if Countie don't think it right to enjoy herself 'long o' the neighbors, wha-wha-what makes her go with us?" pertinently inquired Mrs. Mossop.

"What, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Constantia. "What but the bad example. 'Evil communications corrupt good manners,' I suppose! That is the reason!"

"Never mind, aunties! We had to accept the Goodwins' invitation. They are such old and dear friends; but this is the last! And after Thursday, when we are away, you can settle down to as quiet a life as you please," concluded Ora, as they all went up stairs to lie down and rest.

The next day was a busy one at Hall-in-Umbra; the family had to prepare for a new party of guests; the Pendletons had written from Richmond that they should arrive at Lower Umbra station by the noon express.

Early in the morning Ora sent her large sleigh, fitted with her best bearskins, drawn by her finest horses, and driven by her reliable coachman, Mr. Pepper, to meet the travelers. She also sent the ox cart, driven by Old Charley, to fetch the baggage, of which there would be a great quantity, for besides the personal effects of the Pendletons, there would be the wedding outfit of the bride, which had been made up in Richmond, and was to be brought down by these friends.

While sleigh and cart were on their way to the station, the servants of the hall, under the immediate supervision of their young mistress, were busily engaged making ready for the expected visitors. Fires were lighted in their bedrooms, freshly aired linen put on beds, and lavender-scented towels hung on racks.

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The party, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton and their two grown-up sons, Mr. Samuel and Mr. Philip, reached the hall in time to dress for dinner.

They were warmly received by their young hostess, and immediately shown to their rooms.

A little after them came the luggage, which was carried up stairs—that of the new visitors to their apartments, and that containing the bride's trousseau to a spare room, where it was to be unpacked.

As soon as the travelers had changed their dresses they came down into the drawing room, where they were cordially greeted by Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia Orkney and by Frederick of Hohenfels, Conrad Orkney and Bevvie.

Dinner was announced, and Prince Frederick, at Miss Orkney's request, gave his arm to Mrs. Pendleton, Conrad Orkney followed with Bevvie, Mr. Pendleton with Mrs. Mossop, Mr. Samuel with Miss Constantia, and Mr. Philip with the young hostess.

This little dinner party of ten congenial friends met around as epicurean a repast as could have been dressed by the most accomplished of cooks, though this was served in an Old Virginia plantation house.

When it was over, the company withdrew to the drawing room, where coffee and tea were served, and where the Pendletons entertained the company with the latest city gossip concerning fashion, society, arts, literature and politics. At ten o'clock, as the travelers were weary with their long journey, they begged to be excused and retired to their rooms.

Mrs. Mossop and Miss Constantia soon followed their example.

The two gentlemen went out into the hall to smoke.

"And now let us go and unpack the wedding dresses.

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I am dying to see them, Ora," said Bevvie, as soon as the two found themselves alone.

And Miss Orkney, though exceedingly weary of the cares and duties of hospitality, laughingly consented.

They went to the spare room to which the boxes had been conveyed, and spent an hour in looking over and admiring all the finery before they also bade each other good night and withdrew to their separate apartments and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BRIDE AND BRIDESMAIDS

There were five that waited on her;
All were young and very fair—
Scarce one fairer than another—
With blue eyes and yellow hair,
But loveliest of the loves they called her,
That sweet bride, the queenliest there.
But the groomsmen—shall we own it?—
Gazed upon the bridesmaids fair—
Gazed upon the blue-eyed virgins,
With their shining, yellow hair,
And haply thought how blest the bridals,
Were their brides these beauties rare.

—ANONYMOUS.

THREE days later came the wedding of Conrad and Oresta Orkney.

Their engagement—the engagement of cousins bearing the same family name—met the full approval of all their friends, who deemed that marriage between rela-

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tives or neighbors the most desirable sort of unions for young people.

And theirs was to be in all respects a good, old-fashioned wedding, according to the customs and traditions of their county.

The marriage ceremony was to be performed by the pastor of their parish, in the drawing room of the bride's home, and in the presence of as many friends, relatives and acquaintances as could be gathered together, and it was to be succeeded by a dance and a supper, but not by any bridal tour.

No, indeed. Such a proceeding would have been unprecedented in that neighborhood, and the innovation would have shocked the whole community.

No, indeed. Bride and groom, after having been married at home, must stay at home, and entertain their neighbors, and receive entertainments from them in return.

If there were to follow any pleasure trip whatever, it must follow some months or years after.

The marriage morning dawned auspiciously.

The sun rose in cloudless splendor to a clear blue sky, over a hard-frozen, snow-covered earth.

The family and visitors at Hall-in-Umbra were early astir.

Mrs. Mossop presided at the breakfast table, and made formal excuses for her niece, Miss Orkney, who, in accordance with a local etiquette, that day must keep her room, nor be seen by any except her attendants until she should appear in bridal array.

Early in the forenoon arrived Theophilus Goodwin's five flower daughters, who were to be Ora's bridesmaids. They drove over in a large sleigh, bringing band-boxes containing their dresses for the coming event. They

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went directly up stairs to Ora's room, and were closeted with her for the rest of the day.

At dusk the long drawing room, which had been prepared for the ceremony, was brilliantly lighted up by three large chandeliers, hanging at equal distances from the lofty carved ceiling.

The wedding guests—who numbered no more than half a hundred, although every one of the old hereditary friends and neighbors of the family had been invited—soon began to arrive, some on handsome sleighs, furnished with heavy furs, and drawn by fine horses, and others in all sorts of carts, wagons and carriages set upon temporary runners supplied with straw, rugs and blankets, and drawn by draught horses, mules or steers—for among all these good country folk who had been bidden to the wedding, some were rich and some were poor and some of every degree between poverty and wealth.

Mr. Pepper, with an efficient staff of grooms, waited in front of the illuminated mansion to receive these various guests and take their divers equipages to the stables.

Old Charley stayed in the brilliantly lighted hall to welcome the gentlemen and bow them off to a rear dressing room, where they might take off their ulsters and draw on their white kids.

Meantime Betsy waited at the foot of the stairs to courtesy the ladies up to the long bed chamber which had been prepared as a dressing room for the occasion.

And presently came the band—oh! not at all a celebrated band! It had never been heard of in the great cities. It was composed solely of negro musicians from the neighboring plantations, with Mr. Goodwin's Peter for their leader.

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They were nine in number and were dressed in their Sunday's best clothes—of which indeed the grotesque costume of the "Ethiopian Minstrels," with their lofty, snowy, peaked collars and startling cravats, is no very great exaggeration.

This band was shown to their stand, a temporary platform across the rear of the long drawing room, fitted with a bench against the wall for a seat and a ledge in front for a rest.

Here they sat, full of self-conscious importance, smiling and bowing to each other, or strumming and tuning their instruments, while the room slowly filled with wedding guests, and they waited the entrance of the bridal procession to strike up the wedding march.

The last arrival was that of the Rev. Dr. Welch, the rector of St. Asaph's, at Lower Umbra, who entered the drawing room and quietly shook hands here and there with the company, who were all his own parishioners.

And now all the guests were assembled. The ladies were seated in rather frigid formality on high-backed chairs or sofas ranged against the walls on the four sides of the room, so as to leave the middle of the floor clear for the ceremony and the cotillions. The gentlemen were standing in groups in the corners, near the doors, or around the two hickory wood fires that blazed in the two handsome open fireplaces of the drawing room.

Presently the band was heard to strike up the local wedding march, an old-time country tune—

"Come, haste to the wedding, ye friends and ye neighbors."

And all eyes were turned toward the door, by which the bridal procession was seen to enter.

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First came the beautiful bride, leaning on the bridegroom's arm. She wore a rich dress of white silk made with a demi-train, and half covered with a long Brussels lace veil, that was fastened with a spray of orange blossoms to her sunny, rippling hair. These, with the little accessories of white satin boots, white kid gloves, white lace handkerchief and bouquet of white rosebuds, completed her simple but elegant toilet. Ora had temporarily lost her brilliant complexion. She was now as pale as ivory; but very tranquil, too. The bridegroom's dress being the regulation dress of a gentleman, needs no description whatever.

Behind the bridal pair walked the first bridesmaid, Hyacinth Goodwin, and the first groomsman, Samuel Pendleton; behind them the four other bridesmaids and groomsmen in the order of their age. The bridesmaids all wore white Organdy dresses, white ribbons, wreaths and gloves; the groomsmen, the routine evening dress.

The rector of St. Asaph's arose and took his stand on the rug, with his back to the chimney and his face to the company.

The bridal train fell into line before him, the bride and bridegroom being in the center, the bridesmaids standing on her left and the groomsmen on his right.

The band hushed their music and opened their eyes. The company grew still as death. The minister opened the prayer book and commenced the solemn marriage rites of the church so familiar to all, yet always, and to every one, so almost awfully impressive!

It takes but a very few minutes to rivet those strong, lifelong bonds that only death or crime may break.

It was soon over. The benediction was pronounced and the newly-made husband saluted his young wife. Friends, neighbors, relatives, gathered around the pair

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with smiles, tears and congratulations, while the musicians struck up:

"Hail to the bride, the queen of the feast."

While this was going on inside of the long drawing room, an equally interesting scene was transpiring without.

CHAPTER XL

CHAPTER XXXIX

As was the custom with country weddings in Old Virginia, all the negroes in the neighborhood were on hand to witness the performance.

Every door and window that opened upon the scene was filled with protruding heads, staring eyes and gaping mouths of the servants of the house and the laborers of the fields, who had gathered on the lawn, on the piazza and even in the hall to gaze upon the ceremony.

Among those who were peeping in at the front drawing room door was to be seen the monkey face and form of little black Meenie.

She had been left alone by her mother in the hut in the woods, and feeling very lonesome as the winter night came on, she had left the place and followed the path leading through the thicket to the road, and had followed the road toward the hall. Then, attracted and fascinated by the light and music that burst at once upon sight and hearing, she had run into the house.

And now she stood foremost in the drawing room door, so ecstatic with delight that it was with extreme difficulty she was withheld by those around her from

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breaking out into one of her wild and wonderful fandangoes.

When the pleasant bustle made by the demonstrations of overzealous friends had subsided, and the ladies were again seated, the bride's cake was brought on a large silver waiter, in the hands of Old Uncle Charley, and presented to the bride; and she went through the critical form of cutting it by taking the silver knife beside it and making a single incision in the frosting.

Then the cake was carried away and sliced, and served to the guests.

During this process much laughing interest was expressed as by whom the prophetic gold ring that was somewhere buried in the cake should be found.

It was finally found by Hyacinth Goodwin, who never would have acknowledged the fact had it not been discovered by Bevvie, in this manner: Bevvie was sitting next to Hyacinth, and as the latter lifted her bit of cake from the little plate on which it lay, the small gold ring fell tinkling upon the china, and so revealed its presence.

Many jests were bandied about at the expense of the young girl.

"But wait until the bridegroom's cake is cut, and see who will get the gold dollar," exclaimed Mr. Samuel Pendleton.

"I this game to comprehend do fail," complained the prince, falling into his German idiom, as he always did when he spoke hastily.

"It is this," Bevvie explained: "At our country weddings there are always two special cakes cut immediately after the marriage ceremony. The first is the delicate white one which is called the bride's cake. This contains a gold ring. If an unmarried lady get the ring, she will be the next bride. If an unmarried gentleman

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gets the ring, it will be equivalent to his getting the 'mitten,' and he will be doomed to old bachelorhood. The second is the fruit, or black cake, which is called the groom's. This contains a gold dollar. It is served immediately after the bride's cake is eaten. If a single gentleman should get this gold dollar, he is fated to be the next bridegroom; if a single lady should get it, she is doomed to old maidenhood. But if either a married man or woman should get the ring or the dollar, it would mean nothing. Now, you stupid Fritz, do you understand?"

"Comprehend I a degree in. But your 'mitten,' understand I do not."

"I don't think a cannon ball would hurt your head, Fritz, even if you should run against one in the shock of battle!"

"A mitten? Well, to get the mitten means to get a refusal; and this is the origin of the saying: A certain importunate suitor persecuted a lady with a suit that was unsuitable, and she finally non-suited him in this way:

"The last time he asked her hand in marriage he seized it in his fists and held it fast, so that when she refused to give it to him, and pulled it away with force, she left her mitten in his grasp. And the fellow kept the mitten as a trophy, and boasted that if he had not got the lady's hand, he had got her mitten. And his companions began to laugh at him for getting the mitten. And so it grew into a saying, that whenever a suitor got a refusal from a lady, he had got the mitten.

"Now do you understand, you——

"But here comes the groom's cake.

"Now, if either you or I draw either ring or dollar, it will mean nothing," concluded Bevvie, as Old Charley

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was seen to enter the room with the great fruit cake on a large silver waiter, walk up to the bridegroom, and stand solemnly before him.

Conrad Orkney took up the silver knife and cut the whole cake, which the old man immediately took around the room and served to the company.

And there followed a battle of speculation as to who should find the little gold coin.

Young Dr. Leicester was the lucky man, and he immediately proclaimed his good fortune amid the laughter and congratulations of the young people.

"And means it all that those two, the young fraulein and the Herr Doctor, married together will be?" inquired the prince.

"No, Fritz; not at all. It only means that she will be the next bride, and he the next bridegroom. They may marry each other, or each of them marry some one else. But see, they are going to dance now. In this part of the country the bride and groom always open the ball by dancing together. It would be considered 'bad form' elsewhere, I suppose, but it is the custom here," said Bevvie.

"And will allow the custom here that the bride ask I the honor of her hand the first dance after?" inquired the prince.

"Certainly; though she may be engaged to others for every dance this evening. You should have secured one sooner."

"Intelligent not am I the customs of this rural district in."

"No, dear Fritz; that you are not. But do not talk any more. I cannot hear you with all this loud music."

The negro band had, in fact, struck up the fastest cotillion that they knew of—

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"Fire in the mountains! Run, boys! Run, boys!"

There was room for two sets on that floor. The first set was formed by the bride and bridegroom, with three bridesmaids and three groomsmen; the second set by the remaining two bridesmaids and two groomsmen, with two of the Arlington girls and two of the Colville young men.

No slow, gliding measures and languid turns in this dance! No, indeed! But swiftly flashing feet and whirling forms, to keep up with the breathless time of the music—

"Fire in the mountains! Run, boys! Run, boys!"

When that set was over and the young ladies were led to their seats, the prince went up to the bride and with formal courtesy asked "if of her hand the honor the next dance have should he?"

She replied politely in the affirmative, adding, with a smile, that although she was engaged for all the succeeding dances, yet this one she had reserved for him, on the hazard of his asking for it.

He thanked her and complimented her as if she had been a "serene highness" instead of a young lawyer's wife, and led her to the head of the next cotillion.

The bridegroom led Bevvie to the stand opposite. Other places were taken, and the dancing recommenced to the maddening music of the "Ship in a Gale."

Oh! what a row, what a rumpus, and a rioting

"They all endure,
You may be sure,
Who go to sea!"

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And so the music and dancing were kept up until midnight, when a sumptuous supper was served in the large dining room.

The company went in by relays, so that there was no hurrying and no crowding, while an efficient force of skilled servants waited on each set, and quickly cleared the table for the next one.

At two o'clock the dancing was resumed and kept up until sunrise, when the musicians bagged their instruments and left the platform, and the guests were served with hot coffee, after which they all departed, leaving the happy pair and the weary household to repose.

For the next four weeks there was a succession of entertainments in the neighborhood to which the festivities of Christmas had seemed a mere prelude.

At all these, given in their honor, the bride and groom, with their full staff of bridesmaids and groomsmen, were present.

And the gossips watched the manners of these youthful attendants on the newly wedded pair, and whispered among themselves that the old proverb to the effect that "one marriage makes many" seemed very likely to be fulfilled in their cases.

But before the month was ended the Prince and Princess Frederick von Hohenfels took leave of all their friends at Hall-in-Umbra, and with their child and servants left for New York, *en route* for Havre and Antwerp.

The pain of parting was somewhat softened by the promise of Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Orkney to visit the prince and princess in Belgium during the following summer.

The Pendletons were the next to go. And last of all

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the company who had stayed so long at Hall-in-Umbra, Mrs. Mossop and Miss Orkney left for Owlwood.

And then the young married pair had their beautiful home to themselves.

After three serenely happy months in their sylvan seclusion they left home on the first of May, and went to New York, whence they sailed for Liverpool.

They reached London when the fashionable season was at its height.

Through the American minister at the court of St. James they obtained introduction into the best society there, and on the occasion of her majesty's first drawing room, the bride was presented to the queen. They spent several weeks very pleasantly in London, making frequent excursions thence into other interesting parts of England. On the first of August they crossed the sea to Antwerp and paid their promised visit to the Prince and Princess Frederick of Hohenfels, whom they found well and happy in the Palace von Engelstedt, in the company of the aged baron.

They afterward spent the autumn in admiring and delightful travel over the continent of Europe.

They finally returned to their own country better satisfied with it than ever before, more thoroughly convinced that it was the "promised land," the "Canaan," the "New Jerusalem" of this material human life.

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CHAPTER XL

"ONE MARRIAGE MAKES MANY"

Then I mused upon the adage
'Till my wisdom grew perplexed,
And I wondered, as the churchman
Dwelt upon his holy text,
Which of all who heard his lesson
Would require his service next.

Whose will be the next occasion
For the flowers, the feast, the wine?
Thine perchance, my dearest lady,
Oh—who knows?—it may be mine.
What if 'twere—forgive the fancy—
What if 'twere both mine and thine?

—T. W. PARSONS.

VERY few years have passed since the events related in the last chapter.

Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Orkney are living at Richmond, where he is recognized as an able lawyer and a rising statesman; and where she is known as the happy mistress of a well ordered home and mother of a lovely little family.

But though their town house is their permanent residence, they still keep up their old ancestral homestead, Hall-in-Umbra. They go there every summer, sometimes with only their own family, for the purpose of seclusion and repose; at other times with a select party of city friends, who deem it a great privilege to enjoy

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the cordial hospitality of such hosts, in the midst of such pure air and fine scenery.

The Prince and Princess Frederick von Hohenfels are so happy in their country seat near Antwerp, with their growing family, that it is very doubtful whether, even after the death of the old Baron von Engelstedt, Fritz will ever realize his dream of emigrating to America, dropping his title, becoming a naturalized citizen, buying a vast tract of land on the great Pacific slope twenty times as large as a German grand duchy, and opening a city of refuge for discrowned heads when the revolutionists shall have had their way.

The two old ladies of Owlwood still live at the old farmhouse, where they manage both house and farm, where they knit and sew, pickle and preserve, and teach the negro children their catechism by word of mouth and enforce the lesson by cuff of ear.

Old Mrs. Mossop has not "tripped it on the light fantastic" since that memorable occasion of the surprise party at Hall-in-Umbra.

She is in the habit of telling her neighbors, when alluding to that frolic, that she had not danced for thirty years previous to that evening, and adding that she does not expect to dance for thirty years more—which seems highly probable, considering that the good mistress of Owlwood is something over seventy years of age.

All the Goodwin girls are married and prospering, thank Heaven! for they deserved to do so.

This was the way in which it all happened:

In the first place, at the wedding of Hall-in-Umbra the two handsomest groomsmen, the Messrs. Samuel and Philip Pendleton, fell desperately in love with the two prettiest bridesmaids, the Misses Hyacinth and Jessamine Goodwin. And during the month of bridal fes-

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tivities that followed, so successful were the lovers in their wooing, that the ensuing Easter holidays were celebrated by a double wedding at Welcoming.

These two married sisters live in Richmond, near Ora Orkney, and they are all such firm friends that whenever the latter returns to spend the summer at Hall-in-Umbra, the former come to Welcoming to visit their father for the season, so that in town or country, in winter or summer, they are always neighbors.

And next it happened that young Thomas Colville, who had been Conrad Orkney's third groomsman, discovered that he could not possibly consent to honor this planet with his presence unless Laurel Goodwin would consent to share his fate, and he succeeded in convincing her that life would be no better than a barren desert or a howling wilderness unless she passed it by his side.

So at midsummer there was a third wedding at Welcoming, after which "Tom" took his youthful bride home to Colville Creek, to keep house for the old bachelor uncle, Thomas Colville, senior, whose active manager and presumptive heir Mr. Tom was.

Later on in the autumn Mr. Benjamin Arlington, another groomsman of Conrad Orkney, began to pay his addresses to Myrtle Goodwin, and so prospered in his wooing that in the next Christmas holidays there was a fourth wedding at Welcoming, from which the young husband carried his youthful wife to his own fine manor house at The Oaks.

Thus it followed that Pink was the only daughter left home with Squire Goodwin.

"I will never, never leave you, dearest daddy," she said. "One daughter, out of so many that you have brought up, ought to be willing to become an old maid

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and live at home to be company for the father, and that will be I myself! I will never leave you, dear dad! Never, no, never!"

And she kept her word, for she never did leave him for a single day, under any circumstances, as you will presently see.

Young Dr. Leicester, in gratitude for all Mr. Goodwin's kindness to himself, and in sympathy with the father's loneliness after the flight of all except one of his home birds from their nest, frequently came in the evening to help the old gentleman to pass away the time with a game of chess.

Very gradually the young physician seemed to grow conscious of Pink's existence, then of her beauty, her intelligence, her moral worth.

Finally, after a few months had passed in this manner, he began to suspect that he was not really the "blighted being" he had imagined himself to be from the moment in which he had discovered that the beautiful Belvidera, upon whom he had set his young affections, was already the wife of another man. He began to fear that he was actually falling in love with the loveliest girl he had ever seen.

After a few weeks more he was sure of it—so sure that he felt his future happiness to depend on his winning her heart and her hand.

And it followed that—aided and abetted by the squire, the doctor did finally succeed in persuading the little lady to accept him for her husband; though she kept her word and never left her father's house.

The fifth wedding at Welcoming came off in the early spring. At it were all the friends and relations from far and near.

The Orkneys, who had returned from Europe, and

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the Pendletons, young and old, from Richmond, and the old ladies from Owlwood, as well as the Colvilles, Farnsworths and Arlingtons from the immediate neighborhood, all came to do honor to the occasion.

After the wedding the young pair continued to reside at Welcoming, where the doctor is gaining an extensive practice.

The little Wonder of the Woods, who for so many months was the hidden center of so much mystery and the cause of such great commotion at Hall-in-Umbra and its vicinity, requires a few more words of explanation.

She continued to reside on the plantation with her mother. As she gradually recovered her lost faculty, or perhaps we should say her lost habit of speech, and as her memory was constantly stimulated by leading questions, she began slowly and at irregular intervals to reveal some facts in regard to her mysterious life in the Caves of Umbra.

It was very much as Ora Orkney and others had conjectured it to have been.

The deafening and continued thunder of the artillery at the battle of Black Rock had frightened her nearly out of her senses, especially as she could nowhere find the refuge of her mother's arms. The mother had gone off, as has been related.

Meenie at length ran away to get clear of the roar of the cannon and to find her mother, if possible.

Far, far away from her home she had wandered before she sank exhausted for want of rest and food down on the ground, near the mouth of the caves, where she was found half dead by the old herb doctor, who took her to his rude home and fed and warmed her.

Perhaps the old man wanted company in his hermitage, "something to love, something to care for." How-

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ever that might have been, he kept the child with him until he had grown very fond of her and she of him, whom she called "Daddy."

She lived with him in the cave for some years, until he died suddenly on one of his long tramps, and was found dead, and was buried at a distance at the expense of the county.

She knew nothing of his fate at the time. She only knew that he went out one morning with his bag of medicinal herbs and roots on his back, and that he never returned.

After this, she lived by herself in the caves as he had lived. She was not afraid of solitude, or of wilderness, or wild beasts. She was only afraid of men and women and noise.

She foraged for herself, rising early in the morning and stealing into farmyards, in the darkness before dawn, to milk cows, rob hens' nests of eggs, or clothes lines of garments that had been left out all night.

She learned from the squirrels and raccoons to climb trees. She could climb the highest tree or the highest wall. By means of her strong, agile feet and hands, with their long, tough finger and toe nails, she could climb up the outside of the tallest chimney and down the inside, and in this manner she could enter at night in the most securely fastened chambers, take whatever she could carry off, and escape by the way she had come in.

Nothing could ever prevent her from entering a room by way of the chimney except a fire on the hearth below. She never attempted to climb a chimney from which she saw smoke issuing. And even when she saw no smoke and ventured to the top of the chimney, if on looking down the flue she saw the faintest glow of a

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smoldering fire below, she would venture no farther, but return to the ground by the way she had come, and then run off to forage in some more practicable locality.

In this manner she had invaded Hall-in-Umbra many times, carrying off whatever she liked, in all the "innocence of ignorance."

Now, however, that she has been tamed and taught, this little wild creature has left off pilfering; but she still climbs the highest trees and loftiest buildings, and upon the most perilous and giddy places, such as the edges of the eaves of houses, or the points of the gable roofs of barns, she will dance fandangoes of the most grotesque and alarming description, putting her friends in a state of acute terror for the safety of her life and limbs, besides keeping them in a condition of chronic dread of her discovery and abduction by some enterprising traveling circus.

Does any one care to know the fate of the counterfeit prince and the deluded heiress? The secret of their adventures may be told in a few words: When hunted to earth by detectives, the bogus prince shot himself to escape arrest. His humiliated widow took refuge with her father, and lives with him in strict seclusion in his country home.

"So ever the right comes uppermost,
And ever is justice done."

THE END

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In point of publication, "Darnley" is that work by Mr. James which follows "Richelieu," and, if rumor can be credited, it was owing to the advice and insistence of our own Washington Irving that we are indebted primarily for the story, the young author questioning whether he could properly paint the difference in the characters of the two great cardinals. And it is not surprising that James should have hesitated; he had been eminently successful in giving to the world the portrait of Richelieu as a man, and by attempting a similar task with Wolsey as the theme, was much like tempting fortune. Irving insisted that "Darnley" came naturally in sequence, and this opinion being supported by Sir Walter Scott, the author set about the work.

As a historical romance "Darnley" is a book that can be taken up pleasurably again and again, for there is about it that subtle charm which those who are strangers to the works of G. P. R. James have claimed was only to be imparted by Dumas.

If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

There is really but little pure romance in this story, for the author has taken care to imagine love passages only between those whom history has credited with having entertained the tender passion one for another, and he succeeds in making such lovers as all the world must love.

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THE SPIRIT OF THE BORDER. A Romance of the Early Settlers in the Ohio Valley. By Zane Grey. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

A book rather out of the ordinary is this "Spirit of the Border." The main thread of the story has to do with the work of the Moravian missionaries in the Ohio Valley. Incidentally the reader is given details of the frontier life of those hardy pioneers who broke the wilderness for the planting of this great nation. Chief among these, as a matter of course, is Lewis Wetzel, one of the most peculiar, and at the same time the most admirable of all the brave men who spent their lives battling with the savage foe, that others might dwell in comparative security.

Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

By no means least among the charms of the story are the vivid word-pictures of the thrilling adventures, and the intense paintings of the beauties of nature, as seen in the almost unbroken forests.

It is the spirit of the frontier which is described, and one can by it, perhaps, the better understand why men, and women, too, willingly braved every privation and danger that the westward progress of the star of empire might be the more certain and rapid. A love story, simple and tender, runs through the book.

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Take it all in all, "Horseshoe Robinson" is a work which should be found on every book-shelf, not only because it is a most entertaining story, but because of the wealth of valuable information concerning the colonists which it contains. That it has been brought out once more, well illustrated, is something which will give pleasure to thousands who have long desired an opportunity to read the story again, and to the many who have tried vainly in these latter days to procure a copy that they might read it for the first time.

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Who can read of the beginning of that sweet life, named Mara, which came into this world under the very shadow of the Death angel's wings, without having an intense desire to know how the premature bud blossomed? Again and again one lingers over the descriptions of the character of that baby boy Moses, who came through the tempest, amid the angry billows, pillowed on his dead mother's breast.

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The character of Captain Brooks, who voluntarily decides to sacrifice his own life in order to save the son of the Englishman, is not among the least of the attractions of this story, which holds the attention of the reader even to the last page.

Interwoven with the plot is the Indian "blood" law, which demands a life for a life, whether it be that of the murderer or one of his race. A more charming story of mingled love and adventure has never been written than "Ticonderoga."

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